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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/19 Winter weather sweeps across US
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/weather/2023/01/19/snow-forecast-thursday-weather-updates/11078088002/
GIST	More than 24 million Americans were under a winter weather advisory Thursday as a snowstorm that hammered Denver with the biggest two-day snowfall in more than 30 years slowly pushed eastward.

"Winter storm continues for the Upper Midwest (and) Great Lakes Thursday with heavy, blowing snow leading to dangerous travel conditions," the [National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center said](#) in a statement.

Additional snowfall totals of around 6-12 inches are forecast for portions of the Upper Great Lakes, with locally higher totals over a foot possible, the statement said. Much of the snowfall is expected to occur over a period of a few hours, with snowfall rates of 1-2" per hour and gusty winds "making travel difficult to impossible."

Some sleet and a glaze of freezing rain may mix in for some areas, generally from central Wisconsin into the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan, the weather service said. The snow will begin to taper off from west to east through early Friday morning.

Parts of Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin could see 4 to 8 inches of snow Thursday. Gusty winds up to 35 mph will lead to instances of blowing snow, along with "near-whiteout conditions" during the heaviest snow, the weather service warned.

In Wisconsin, the heaviest snow totals are expected to be 5 to 8 inches for central and east-central Wisconsin, as well as 5 to 8 inches in Green Bay and Fox Cities, [the Appleton Post-Crescent, part of the USA TODAY Network, reports](#). Northern Door County could see up to 10 inches of snow.

Dangerous gusty winds will be possible Thursday across parts of Arkansas, where at least one tornado was confirmed on Wednesday.

"Unsecured objects will be blown around, high profile vehicles will be a challenge to drive, and area lakes and rivers could become dangerous to navigate," the weather service said.

Snow and some ice is expected to expand into the Northeast on Thursday and into Friday, according to the weather service.

Snow totals of 4-8 inches were forecast from Upstate New York east through Vermont, New Hampshire, and coastal Maine late Thursday and into the day Friday. Locally higher totals over a foot are possible for higher elevations of the Green and White Mountains.

Some accumulating freezing rain is also possible, especially for the Catskills, Poconos, and Berkshires.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Russia, China naval drills South Africa
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-government-south-africa-e9ae753c82502dbcf0cffd48be97de02
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Russia and China will conduct naval drills in the Indian Ocean off the coast of South Africa next month in another indication of their strengthening relationships with Africa’s most developed country amid the war in Ukraine and global financial uncertainty.</p> <p>The South African armed forces said Thursday that they and the Russian and Chinese navies will engage in “a multinational maritime exercise” from Feb. 17-27 off South Africa’s east coast near the cities of Durban and Richards Bay.</p> <p>The drills will happen around the one-year anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 and will bring more focus on the refusal of South Africa — a leading voice on its continent — to side with the West and condemn Russia’s actions.</p> <p>The announcement also comes days before Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to visit South Africa and hold talks with South African counterpart Naledi Pandor.</p>

The South African government said last year that it had adopted a neutral stance over Ukraine and called for dialogue and diplomacy, but the upcoming naval drills have led the country's main opposition party to accuse the government of effectively siding with Russia.

The South African government denies it has taken sides and has called for the end of the war in Ukraine.

But the South African National Defense Force, which incorporates all of its armed forces, said next month's naval exercise would "strengthen the already flourishing relations between South Africa, Russia and China." The aim of the drills was "sharing operational skills and knowledge," the SANDF said.

The three countries also conducted a similar naval exercise in 2019 in Cape Town, while Russia and China held joint naval drills in the East China Sea last month.

South Africa, a key Western partner, was one of several African countries that abstained in a United Nations vote last year condemning Russia's invasion. The United States and the European Union had hoped that South Africa would support the international condemnation of Russia and act as a leader for other nations in Africa.

President Joe Biden hosted South African President Cyril Ramaphosa at the White House in September, when a key talking point was their differences over the war in Ukraine. U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken visited South Africa last year.

Experts have warned of Russia's increased military influence in Africa since it first annexed parts of Ukraine in 2014, while the Biden administration also recognizes the importance of strengthening relations on the continent after China has spent decades entrenching itself in Africa's natural resources markets. Improving relations with South Africa is central to the U.S. effort of limiting Russian and Chinese influence.

The South African government drew more attention over its stance regarding Russia in October when it said it would allow a superyacht linked to Russian oligarch Alexey Mordashov to dock in Cape Town despite him being under U.S. and EU sanctions.

The South African government has also been accused of allowing another sanctioned Russian vessel to dock at a naval base near Cape Town in December.

South Africa's relationship with Russia is largely because of the support the Soviet Union gave to Ramaphosa's now-ruling African National Congress party in its fight to bring down apartheid, the regime of repression against the country's Black majority. Apartheid ended in 1994 when the ANC won the first democratic elections in South Africa and Nelson Mandela became president.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Putin ally: defeat could trigger nuclear war
SOURCE	https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/putin-ally-medvedev-warns-nuclear-074558491.html
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (Reuters) -Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, an ally of Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin, warned NATO on Thursday that the defeat of Russia in Ukraine could trigger a nuclear war.</p> <p>Striking a similar tone at what he described as an anxious time for the country, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church said trying to destroy Russia would mean the end of the world.</p> <p>Since Russia invaded Ukraine, Medvedev has repeatedly raised the threat of a nuclear apocalypse, but his admission now of the possibility of Russia's defeat indicates the level of Moscow's concern over increased Western weapons deliveries to Ukraine.</p> <p>"The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war," Medvedev, who serves as deputy chairman of Putin's powerful security council, said in a post on Telegram.</p>

"Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends," said Medvedev, who served as president from 2008 to 2012.

Medvedev said NATO and other defence leaders, due to meet at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to talk about strategy and support for the West's attempt to defeat Russia in Ukraine, should think about the risks of their policy.

Russia and the United States, by far the largest nuclear powers, hold around 90% of the world's nuclear warheads. Putin is the ultimate decision maker on the use of nuclear weapons.

Asked if Medvedev's remarks signified that Russia was escalating the crisis to a new level, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "No, it absolutely does not mean that."

He said Medvedev's remarks were in full accordance with Russia's nuclear doctrine which allows for a nuclear strike after "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened".

While NATO has conventional military superiority over Russia, when it comes to nuclear weapons, Russia has nuclear superiority over the alliance in Europe.

Putin casts Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West, and has said that Russia will use all available means to protect itself and its people.

"ALARMING TIME"

Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the deadliest European conflicts since World War Two and the biggest confrontation between Moscow and the West since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

The United States and its allies have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an imperial land grab, while Ukraine has vowed to fight until the last Russian soldier is ejected from its territory.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, said in a sermon: "We pray to the Lord that he bring the madmen to reason and help them understand that any desire to destroy Russia will mean the end of the world."

"Today is an alarming time," state news agency RIA quoted him as saying. "But we believe that the Lord will not leave Russian land."

NOT BACKING DOWN

Since a grim New Year's Eve message describing the West as Russia's true enemy in the war on Ukraine, Putin has sent several signals that Russia will not back down. He has despatched hypersonic missiles to the Atlantic and appointed his top general to run the war.

Putin said on Wednesday that Russia's powerful military-industrial complex was ramping up production and was one of the main reasons why his country would prevail in Ukraine.

Washington has not detailed in public what it would do if Putin ordered what would be the first use of nuclear weapons in war since the United States unleashed the first atomic bomb attacks on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

U.S. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns cautioned Putin's spy chief Sergei Naryshkin in November about the consequences of any use of nuclear weapons by Russia, U.S. officials said at the time.

	<p>Russia has 5,977 nuclear warheads while the United States has 5,428, China 350, France 290 and the United Kingdom 225, according to the Federation of American Scientists.</p> <p>Medvedev, 57, who once presented himself as a reformer who was ready to work with the United States to liberalise Russia, has recast himself since the war as the most publicly hawkish member of Putin's circle.</p> <p>He said that the nuclear risks of the Ukraine crisis should be obvious to any Western politicians who had "preserved at least some traces of intelligence".</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 China hospitals strain under Covid outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/chinese-hospitals-creak-strain-huge-covid-outbreak-rcna66265
GIST	<p>SHANGHAI — Patients are crammed into hallways, stairwells and lobbies, and still the sick keep coming. In scenes reminiscent of the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, Chinese hospitals are struggling to cope with a surge in Covid-19 cases following the country's decision to scrap its "zero-Covid" policy in early December.</p> <p>Although the move relaxed three years of strict measures that had set off rare mass unrest, it also unleashed the virus on a population of 1.4 billion people that had been largely shielded from it. After international criticism that it had not been transparent about the severity of the outbreak, the Chinese government said last weekend that it had recorded 60,000 Covid-related deaths since Dec. 8.</p> <p>But that figure covers only those who have died in hospitals, suggesting the true death toll could be much higher. An estimate on Tuesday by Airfinity, an independent forecaster based in London, put the number of Covid-related deaths in China since Dec. 1 at 608,000, 10 times the official figure.</p> <p>"Our forecast estimates a significant burden on China's health care system for the next fortnight," Dr. Matt Linley, Airfinity's analytics director, said, "and it is likely that many treatable patients could die due to overcrowded hospitals and lack of care."</p> <p>NBC News witnessed chaotic scenes in overcrowded hospitals in Shanghai, China's financial center and most populous city at 26 million people. Less than a year after a grueling two-month lockdown in an effort to stamp out the virus, the city is now experiencing the consequences of letting it loose.</p> <p>The bodies of those who die in the hospital are taken for cremation. At one funeral home visited by NBC News, their families are allotted 10 minutes to say goodbye. Relatives carry flowers and pictures of the dead through the rain to their designated time slot.</p> <p>"My father had no symptoms but still died," one 31-year-old woman said outside a hospital. Her mother, who has heart disease, was still hospitalized with the virus.</p> <p>"Thirty-five people passed away the day before yesterday, right here," said the woman, who lives in Australia and like others interviewed did not wish to be named due to the political sensitivity of the issue in China. "Since my mom was here, I've come here to see [her] every day. On the day my father moved into the hospital, almost all patients in the emergency department died."</p> <p>The intensity of the outbreak has taken her and many others by surprise.</p> <p>"It's way more severe than I expected, much more severe," the woman said. "Especially for seniors, whether or not they have had some diseases before, the virus could end their lives."</p> <p>The hospital here is so busy, street vendors have set up outside to profit from the spike in visitors after almost two years of scraping by with hardly any business at all.</p>

“Most of my customers are the families of the patients and the patients themselves, or the nurses inside the hospital,” one vendor said.

Satellite images taken in December and January by the Colorado-based space technology company Maxar showed a high number of cars as well as new construction at crematoriums in cities across mainland China, providing a glimpse into the outbreak’s human cost.

At a funeral in Shanghai, a woman leaving the crematorium cried: “Why did you leave us so soon? Now I’m alone in the world.”

China on Thursday repeated complaints about Western media coverage of its outbreak, with an editorial in People’s Daily, the official newspaper of the ruling Communist Party, criticizing reports in some unidentified outlets as “completely biased hype, smear and political manipulation with ulterior motives.”

It said life was returning to normal in places where cases had peaked, as residents in some major cities have also told NBC News.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said Wednesday that “zero-Covid” had been the “right choice” for China for most of the pandemic but that the government’s response had entered a “new phase.”

“Tough challenges remain, but the light of hope is right in front of us,” he said in a virtual meeting with medical staff at a hospital in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, according to state media.

Xi said he was particularly worried about those living in rural areas, as huge numbers of people travel to their hometowns for the Lunar New Year, also known as Spring Festival, which officially starts on Sunday. Rural areas in China often have much fewer medical resources than cities.

Also on Wednesday, Chinese authorities announced a crackdown on pandemic “rumors” during the holiday, calling it a “Spring Festival online environment improvement” program.

Despite strict censorship, stories and complaints about the virus outbreak have spread widely on Chinese social media, challenging the official narrative that it is under control. Among other issues, the Cyberspace Administration of China said over the next month it would take action against “fabricating patient experiences” and promoting fake virus treatments in order to “prevent gloomy sentiments” during the Lunar New Year.

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HEADLINE	01/19 Russia: espionage case against US citizen
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-fsb-opens-espionage-case-us-citizen-rcna66459
GIST	<p>Russia has opened a criminal case against a United States citizen on suspicion of espionage, the country's Federal Security Service announced Thursday.</p> <p>The security service did not name the individual or say whether they had been taken into custody.</p> <p>"The American is suspected of collecting intelligence information on biological topics directed against the security of the Russian Federation," the security service said. It did not expand further on the allegations against the individual.</p> <p>The State Department did not immediately respond to an overnight request for comment.</p> <p>The development comes weeks after WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner was freed from Russian custody after the Biden administration negotiated her release in exchange for arms dealer Viktor Bout.</p>

	<p>Griner was among a number of U.S. citizens to have been detained in Russia in recent years. She returned to the U.S. in December, nearly 10 months after she was first detained and then jailed on drug charges.</p> <p>While the U.S. was able to negotiate her release, other Americans remain detained in Russia, including former Marine Paul Whelan, who was arrested in 2018 on espionage charges and sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2020.</p> <p>Russia has so far refused to release Whelan, with the seriousness of espionage charges seen as a reason why.</p> <p>Last week, Russia released a U.S. citizen who had crossed into its Kaliningrad exclave weeks after Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Taylor Dudley, 35, a U.S. Navy veteran, had been backpacking in Europe when he crossed the Polish-Russian border in April, Jonathan Franks, a lawyer who represents families of Americans detained overseas, said, according to Reuters.</p> <p>The circumstances around how and why Dudley crossed the Russian border were not clear, nor were the details around how he came to be released.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Govt. reaches statutory debt limit
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/us-reaches-debt-limit-setting-early-june-congress-deadline-rcna66357
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The U.S. government is hitting its statutory debt limit on Thursday, requiring the Treasury Department to begin resorting to "extraordinary measures" to pay the bills.</p> <p>In a recent letter to congressional leaders, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said those special financial tools can extend until "early June" and that Congress will need to act to prevent default.</p> <p>"Yet the use of extraordinary measures enables the government to meet its obligations for only a limited amount of time. It is therefore critical that Congress act in a timely manner to increase or suspend the debt limit," Yellen wrote.</p> <p>"Failure to meet the government's obligations would cause irreparable harm to the U.S. economy, the livelihoods of all Americans, and global financial stability," she said. "Indeed, in the past, even threats that the U.S. government might fail to meet its obligations have caused real harms, including the only credit rating downgrade in the history of our nation in 2011."</p> <p>Yellen's warning comes as the new Republican House majority, led by Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California, demands conservative policy concessions in the form of spending cuts to lift the debt ceiling.</p> <p>"Let's change our behavior now. Let's sit down. He's the president. We're the majority in the House. The Democrats are the majority in the Senate. And that's exactly the way the founders designed Congress to work, find the compromise and find the commonsense compromise that puts us back onto a balanced budget," McCarthy told reporters Tuesday on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>McCarthy, R-Calif., said a debt limit increase with no strings attached was "totally off the table," adding that federal retirement spending should be curtailed to save those programs from bankruptcy. "Let's sit down and find a place that we can protect Medicare and Social Security for the future generations. Let's put our house in order."</p> <p>"I'd like to sit down with all the leaders, especially with the president, start having discussions. I think it's a sign of arrogance, if you would say, he wouldn't even discuss it," McCarthy said.</p>

But the White House has made clear what President Joe Biden's offer to lift the debt ceiling is: nothing.

"We should be dealing with the debt ceiling without — without conditions. It is important. We're not going to negotiate on this," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

"This is just another attempt by congressional Republicans to force unpopular cuts on programs critical to seniors, the middle class and working families. Congress needs to act and do so quickly. There is no excuse for political brinkmanship," she said on Tuesday, dismissing the idea that the federal government can breach the debt limit and decide which bills to pay.

McCarthy hasn't specified a list of demands to attach to a debt limit hike. He would need a majority of the House to pass such a measure and put pressure on the Senate and White House to negotiate.

Democrats seized on McCarthy's remarks, along with those of House conservatives who say retirement spending should be curtailed.

Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called it a "nonstarter."

"It's almost silliness for Republicans in the House to be putting Medicare and Social Security on the table as a condition for lifting the debt ceiling," she said. "Hopefully, there will be agreement that we reach in a responsible way to lift the debt ceiling."

Still, any legislation to raise the debt ceiling would have to pass the Senate, which Democrats control with 51 votes, and where 60 votes are needed to break a filibuster.

"America pays its debts. Period. There should be no political brinkmanship with the debt limit. It's reckless for Speaker McCarthy and MAGA Republicans to try and use the full faith and credit of the United States as a political bargaining chip," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said in a statement Tuesday. "A default would be catastrophic for America's working families and lead to higher costs."

Some GOP hard-liners say the borrowing limit should not be raised at all.

"We cannot raise the debt ceiling," Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., said Tuesday on Twitter. "Democrats have carelessly spent our taxpayer money and devalued our currency. They've made their bed, so they must lie in it."

The White House took aim at Biggs' tweet on Wednesday.

"Rep. Biggs is dead wrong to actively support the ruin of millions of American livelihoods, 401k plans, and small businesses, all in the name of scorched earth partisanship," White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said. "Default would needlessly plunge the country into economic chaos, collapse, and catastrophe while giving our competitors like China an historic boost against us."

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HEADLINE	01/18 New: private sponsorship for global refugees
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/refugee-sponsorship-program-us-state-department-welcome-corps/
GIST	<p>Washington — The Biden administration is set to announce on Thursday a pilot program that will allow groups of private American citizens to financially sponsor the resettlement of refugees fleeing war and violence across the world, three people briefed on the announcement told CBS News.</p> <p>The State Department initiative, which will be called Welcome Corps, could pave the way for a seismic shift in U.S. refugee policy, as most refugees brought to the U.S. for the past decades have been resettled by nine nonprofit organizations that receive federal funding.</p>

Under the program, modeled after a long-standing system in Canada, groups of at least five U.S.-based individuals could have the opportunity to sponsor refugees if they raise \$2,275 per refugee, pass background checks and submit a plan about how they will assist the newcomers, the sources said.

Approved private sponsors will play the role of traditional resettlement agencies, helping newly arrived refugees access housing and other basic necessities, such as food, medical services, education and public benefits for which they qualify.

The Biden administration initially said it would launch the program before the end of 2022. But in a statement in late December, the State Department said the timetable had shifted. During the first phase of the program, State Department officials will match sponsors with refugees overseas who already have been cleared to come to the U.S.

"Later on, we will introduce an identification component through the pilot program through which private sponsors will be able to identify refugees overseas to be referred to the (U.S. refugee program) and apply to support their resettlement as private sponsors," the State Department said in its December statement.

The Welcome Corps initiative will be the latest Biden administration effort to expand legal immigration channels for refugees and migrants with family members and others in the U.S. willing to financially sponsor them.

In late 2021, the State Department allowed "sponsor circles" of at least five private individuals to sponsor some of the tens of thousands of Afghan evacuees relocated to the U.S. following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Then, in early 2022, officials launched a program to allow Ukrainians displaced by the Russian invasion of their homeland to come to the U.S. under the humanitarian parole authority if they had U.S.-based sponsors. More than 100,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the U.S. under the policy, federal statistics show.

Officials have since expanded that approach, allowing U.S.-based individuals to sponsor the entry of citizens from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela as part of an effort to deter migrants from these countries from crossing the southern border illegally. Like Ukrainians, migrants from these countries will be allowed to live and work legally in the U.S. on a temporary basis through the parole authority.

Unlike those arriving under the parole authority, the refugees who will arrive under the sponsorship initiative set to be announced Thursday will be eligible for permanent legal status and ultimately, U.S. citizenship, since they will be processed through the traditional refugee program.

Formally created in 1980, the U.S. refugee program has granted a safe haven to more than 3 million refugees found to have fled armed conflicts, ethnic persecution and other forms violence. Refugees undergo interviews, security screenings and medical checks as part of a years-long process before coming to the U.S.

While President Biden vowed to rebuild the U.S. refugee system, which was crippled by the COVID-19 pandemic and drastic Trump-era cuts, his administration has struggled to return refugee admissions to pre-pandemic levels and to meet his lofty resettlement goals.

In fiscal year 2022, the U.S. admitted 25,465 refugees, using only 20% of 125,000 refugee spots allocated by Mr. Biden. In the first three months of fiscal year 2023, for which Mr. Biden again set a goal of welcoming up to 125,000 refugees, the U.S. resettled fewer than 7,000 refugees, State Department figures show.

While the pandemic temporarily suspended refugee admissions and slowed refugee interviews, the program was scaled back dramatically under policy directives issued by President Trump, who argued that refugees were economic, national security and cultural threats to the U.S.

	<p>The Trump administration dramatically slashed refugee admissions, allocating an all-time low of 15,000 spots in fiscal year 2021. It also restricted the categories of those who could be resettled, and tried to give states and cities a veto on refugee resettlement. The restrictions and record-low ceilings led the organizations that resettle refugees to lay off personnel and close offices across the country.</p> <p>As the Biden administration has struggled to rebuild the U.S. refugee system, the number of people displaced by violence around the globe has surpassed 100 million, more than at any other time in history, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of the main U.S. resettlement groups, praised the private sponsorship program for relying on a "forward-thinking approach to leveraging the generosity of the American spirit." But she urged the Biden administration to also prioritize speeding up refugee processing and increasing admissions.</p> <p>"At a time of unprecedented global displacement, there are far too many vulnerable children and families depending on the full restoration of our nation's humanitarian leadership," Vignarajah said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Bar owner: 'apathy' from city hall, SPD
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2023/01/comet-owner-criticizes-apathy-from-city-hall-and-spd-after-latest-pike-pine-nightlife-shooting/
GIST	<p>Capitol Hill business owners have called for more help from the mayor and the Seattle Police Department before in response to nightlife gun violence — but last weekend's drive-by shooting at 10th and Pike that sent three people to the hospital has one owner asking for SPD to simply investigate the incident.</p> <p>Jason Lajeunesse says he is grateful nobody else was injured and fortunately nobody was hit inside despite two bullets smashing into the Comet Tavern in the early morning Saturday shooting.</p> <p>"First off, we are so relieved to report that no one inside the business or staff was injured. That being said, two bullets entered the building, one of which was stopped by our pinball machine and one which ricocheted off a metal sign," Lajeunesse said.</p> <p>CHS reported here on the 12:30 AM shooting in which an SUV reportedly sped up E Pike with a shooter firing from inside. Three people on the street outside the Comet were hit and suffered serious but not life-threatening injuries to their lower bodies, police said. The incident was one of a handful of shootings reported in Seattle over the weekend including deadly gun violence on Rainier Ave that left a restaurant owner dead.</p> <p>Lajeunesse tells CHS that Comet staff located one of the bullets in Saturday's shooting on the floor behind the pinball machine but that police haven't seemed interested. According to the bar owner, SPD still hadn't stopped by to collect the evidence or take additional witness statements from the weekend shooting as of Tuesday.</p> <p>Shell casings were collected by SPD in the street along E Pike and bullet damage was also reported to other nearby businesses including Poquitos across 10th from the Comet.</p> <p>Nightlife gun violence has been an ongoing issue up and down the Pike/Pine corridor. The most recent early Saturday morning shooting followed another bout of gun violence the previous weekend that included an altercation that sent a bullet through the window of a bar in lower Pike/Pine late that Saturday night. There were no injuries reported in that incident.</p> <p>Nightlife gun violence plagued the area last year including a July shooting outside the Mint Lounge that sent one to the hospital. In September, one person was sent to the hospital in a shootout that erupted in</p>

the **Rancho Bravo** parking lot. Late last year, **Mayor Bruce Harrell** [met with Capitol Hill business representatives to discuss neighborhood safety](#) including the spate of shootings.

“Nighttime safety in Capitol Hill remains a priority, which is why Mayor Harrell met with a group of businesses owners from the Pike/Pine corridor in November 2022 to discuss how safety can be improved for the neighborhood’s residents, visitors, businesses and their employees,” a spokesperson for Harrell office said in a statement sent to CHS about the 10th and Pike shooting.

The mayor’s rep tells CHS that “several business owners voiced support for increased law enforcement presence and relationship building with the Seattle Police Department.”

“The mayor’s comprehensive police recruitment and retention plan takes urgent and long-term steps to ensure a well-staffed department responsive to these community needs,” the spokesperson said.

“Shootings like last weekend’s reinforce the need for continued public safety improvements,” the statement from the mayor’s office concludes. “Mayor Harrell will continue to develop and advance safety efforts using input from Capitol Hill’s business owners to address their concerns and work in partnership with them to advance solutions that improve safety in the neighborhood.”

A Seattle Police spokesperson has not responded to CHS’s inquiry about the shooting investigation. Lajeunesse, who also owns **Lost Lake** and is part of the ownership of **Neumos**, says the nightlife district isn’t getting the public safety support it needs from the city.

“We are extremely frustrated with the lack of support our community has been receiving since COVID,” Lajeunesse said. “There is no SPD presence any more. The apathy and lack of accountability from SPD, City Council and the mayor himself is shocking. We are organizing and we want solutions.”

Meanwhile, the folks at the Comet haven’t been able to locate the second bullet shot into the bar.

“There is one more that we have not found yet and we have called to let SPD know we have some evidence that may be useful,” Lajeunesse said. “Honestly, we don’t know what’s going on or what they are doing.”

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HEADLINE	01/18 Southern Peru unrest: 2 killed in protests
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/2-more-people-killed-in-southern-peru-amid-unrest/
GIST	<p>LIMA, Peru (AP) — Protesters set fire to the police station and judicial office in the Peruvian town of Macusani Wednesday after two people were killed and another seriously injured by gunfire amid antigovernment protests.</p> <p>The deaths were confirmed by Macusani health official Dr. Iván Fernández and brought to 53 the number of people killed during more than a month of unrest following the ouster of President Pedro Castillo.</p> <p>The officers had to escape the police station that the crowd burned in a helicopter, police said. Macusani, about 160 kilometers from the city of Juliaca near Lake Titicaca, is the capital of the province of Carabaya,</p> <p>The deaths come as protesters converge on Lima for an antigovernment protest Thursday that activists hope will open a new chapter in the weeks-old movement demanding President Dina Boluarte’s resignation by bringing the protests to Peru’s capital.</p> <p>Besides Boluarte’s resignation, protesters are demanding the closure of Congress and immediate elections. Some are calling for the release of Castillo, who remains in prison. The governors of Puno, Cusco and Apurímac regions in southern Peru have called for Boluarte’s resignation.</p>

	<p>The unrest began in early December following the destitution and arrest of Castillo, Peru's first president of rural, Andean roots, following his attempt to dissolve Congress and head off his own impeachment.</p> <p>Boluarte was Castillo's former running mate before taking over the presidency. She has said she supports a plan to push up to 2024 elections for president and congress originally scheduled for 2026.</p> <p>Castillo, a political novice who lived in a two-story adobe home in the Andean highlands before moving to the presidential palace, eked out a narrow victory in elections in 2021 that rocked Peru's political establishment and laid bare the deep divisions between residents of the capital, Lima, and the long-neglected countryside.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Poland: divers found near key port
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/questions-in-poland-over-divers-found-near-key-port/
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Police in northern Poland are facing questions over why they released without detailed interrogation three divers rescued from near a key oil port, where they had no authorization to be.</p> <p>Security experts say the presence of the divers in the sensitive area of the Gulf of Gdansk last weekend raised concerns, given the high tensions with Russia over its energy deliveries. The divers had Spanish identity documents.</p> <p>According to Polish media, the divers were rescued early Sunday after they sent a distress message when their unregistered small boat malfunctioned in stormy weather.</p> <p>They were equipped with professional diving gear and claimed they were looking for amber, but none was found in the boat. They had no permission to dive in the gulf.</p> <p>Despite a high level of security introduced across Poland due to the country's support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, police released the men. That has raised questions, the more so because the phone numbers they gave turned out to be inactive.</p> <p>In raising their concerns, experts are pointing to the underwater explosions last summer that damaged the Nord Stream 2 pipelines that run on the Baltic Sea bed and were to carry Russian gas to Germany. Swedish and Danish authorities have said the leaks were sabotage.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Congo protesters oppose foreign troops
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/world/tear-gas-fired-at-congo-protesters-opposing-foreign-troops/
GIST	<p>GOMA, Congo (AP) — Police fired tear gas at demonstrators in eastern Congo on Wednesday after dozens of people took part in an unauthorized protest in Goma against the presence of foreign troops to help quell violence from armed groups.</p> <p>Authorities later detained some participants, as well as some journalists covering the protest.</p> <p>Leaders of the seven-nation East African Community resolved last year to create and deploy a regional force to eastern Congo, where the M23 rebel group has been blamed for growing violence.</p> <p>Kenyan troops arrived late last year, and another contingent from South Sudan was expected in the coming days. However, the troops have faced opposition from some Congolese.</p> <p>"The Kenyan military came here as tourists. They go around the town every day and they do absolutely nothing," demonstrator Gloire Bagaya said. "We as a population have come together to say no to this regional force."</p>

	<p>“(South Sudanese) are also at war at home, but they say they want to bring peace to our country,” Bagaya added. “This is an international plot that wants to Balkanize our country, and nobody will divide our country.”</p> <p>M23 reemerged in eastern Congo a year ago after about a decade of dormancy. Congo accuses Rwanda of supporting the military rebel group, which it denies.</p> <p>As part of an agreement reached in Angola last year, the group said it would withdraw its men from some of the occupied territories before Jan. 15. However, there are still areas under its control.</p> <p>The fighting is exacerbating eastern Congo’s dire humanitarian crisis. Almost 6 million people are internally displaced in the country, with more than 450,000 displaced in North Kivu province since clashes escalated in February.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Ukraine’s volunteer foreign fighters
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/18/foreign-fighters-war-ukraine-volunteers/
GIST	<p>KHARKIV, Ukraine — A 30-year-old former British military captain faced a personal crossroads several months before Russia invaded Ukraine, as he contemplated a desk job at a security firm and a future spent discussing trifles with his sisters and mother in their hometown in southeastern England.</p> <p>He was still struggling with the routines of civilian life when the chance to volunteer to defend Ukraine offered an alternate path. Now, after nearly getting killed in an artillery barrage in Bakhmut, the former officer, who is not being identified for safety reasons, said he is “happier than I have ever been.”</p> <p>The Ukrainian fight has given him purpose, and he is thrilled by the danger. “This war has been a terrible, terrible thing for Ukraine,” he said in a phone interview last month. “But the last nine months have been the best, most enjoyable of my life. I can’t go sit in an office and do PowerPoint for the next 50 years.</p> <p>“There’s a part of me that’s doing it for the right reasons, and there’s part of me that’s doing it for the violence,” the British veteran said. “It’s kind of a bit of both.”</p> <p>The complex motivations that pulled him to the blood-soaked trenches of Ukraine reflect the experiences of thousands who answered President Volodymyr Zelensky’s appeal for volunteer fighters after Russia invaded last February. Some went to defend democracy, others to escape their own demons.</p> <p>An estimated 1,000 to 3,000 such foreign fighters are believed to be active, with most serving in three battalions of the International Legion, according to analysts and academics monitoring them, who stressed that the numbers were rough approximations. The Ukrainian military did not reply to requests for details about the volunteers, or estimates of their numbers.</p> <p>Compared with the battlefield contributions of hundreds of thousands of regular Ukrainian troops, the impact of the volunteers is relatively small. But the foreign fighters draw outside attention in the West, especially when killed or captured, and they raise a thicket of uncomfortable legal, moral and political questions for Ukraine and for the volunteers’ home governments.</p> <p>The willingness of tens of thousands to answer Zelensky’s call speaks to the resonance of Ukraine’s cause: a country aspiring to be a free and democratic member of the European Union fighting for survival against a totalitarian regime with a history of violently violating the territorial sovereignty of its neighbors.</p> <p>But some volunteer fighters are breaking the laws of their home countries to fight in Ukraine, and experts have noted a risk that U.S. volunteers could be violating the Neutrality Act, a law enacted in 1794 that intended to prohibit U.S. citizens from potentially embroiling the country in foreign wars.</p>

Even if legal, the presence of Western fighters in Ukraine cuts against the concerted effort by the Biden administration and its NATO allies to avoid direct involvement in Russia's war. It is also not clear who is responsible for these volunteer soldiers during and after their dangerous combat service.

The choice of many troubled veterans to volunteer in Ukraine also suggests a failure by their own governments to address past trauma and to reintegrate them into civilian life, experts said. Those who are not professional soldiers have posed challenges for Ukraine's military, which has found some fighters to be more cumbersome than helpful.

Ukrainian officials said last spring that 20,000 people from more than 50 different countries had volunteered. But the overwhelming majority appear to have returned home before summer, according to academics studying their involvement and interviews with more than a dozen foreign fighters.

Many seemed more interested in posing for Instagram than committing to the drudgery of trench warfare. Others seemed too eager to live out fantasies from the Call of Duty video game. And some have faced more serious allegations of theft or sexual assault, or were found to be fleeing criminal cases at home.

The realities of the war unnerved many initial volunteers. The intensity of the fighting, and high likelihood of death, stunned even many experienced Western soldiers who found themselves in an artillery war without the air support they relied on in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But for many of the fighters, particularly veterans struggling to integrate back into civilian life, the horrors of bloodshed abroad in Ukraine still proved more attractive than the malaise of peace at home.

Hundreds of these better-trained volunteers are also integrated into smaller units that operate independently of the International Legion. These include groups led by longtime regional opponents of Moscow, such as the Georgian Legion and Chechen battalions, as well as other units led by Westerners, with names like Alpha, Phalanx and the Norman Brigade.

The Quebec-born commander of the volunteer Norman Brigade, who goes by the call sign "Hrulf," said his unit has included fighters from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Jordan, Egypt and Norway, in addition to the United States, Canada and Britain.

Before the war, Hrulf, whom The Washington Post is identifying only by his call sign for security reasons, thought that "Russians and Ukrainians were one people, like brothers and sisters," he said. Now, he has a Ukrainian wife and a daughter and is fully committed to Kyiv's cause. "There's no turning back," he said.

Joseph Hildebrand, 33, was tilling his family farm in the fields of Saskatchewan, harvesting lentils and durum wheat and tending to his cows, having assured his wife he had made peace with giving up his career in the Canadian military, which included two tours in Afghanistan. In fact, he had not.

"He literally could not handle it," Hildebrand's widow, Carissa, said. "He started talking to his friends who went over and just felt he had to do it. ... It just bothered his soul."

Whatever their motivations, the service and sacrifice of foreign fighters is real: Roughly 100 have died and more than 1,000 have been wounded, according to Kacper Rekawek, a researcher at the Center for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo.

Hildebrand was killed in combat in Bakhmut, and it took his family more than five weeks to recover his body. A former Canadian paratrooper and close friend of Hildebrand's said he had been sent on a "suicide mission." The paratrooper, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution by the Ukrainian government, voiced frustration that the Ukrainian forces were not better prepared.

"There are really big issues because a lot of these guys are not trained soldiers," the paratrooper said last month as he was leaving Ukraine after four months of fighting. "It's really hard for me to watch. There's a lot of panic. There's a terrible lack of training."

Other volunteers said the criticism of the Ukrainians was unfair.

“My biggest frustration has been with foreign fighters who complain about, ‘They’re sending us on suicide missions.’ Yeah, bro: What do you think war is?” said Jason Mann, 37, an American serving in a group called Phalanx. Mann served in Afghanistan, earned a computer science degree at Columbia University and worked as a software engineer at Google before coming to Ukraine.

Another British volunteer in Ukraine, who was on a break from fighting north of Kramatorsk in the eastern Donetsk region and goes by the call sign “Swampy,” said he had a “pretty up-and-down time” after leaving the British military due to a knee injury. But the war in Ukraine has given him direction, he said.

“You know exactly why you’re getting up in the morning,” said Swampy, who is 38 and is being identified only by his call sign for security reasons.

A 28-year-old American who fought in Ukraine for roughly six months said this was a common sentiment.

“For a lot of guys, there really was the ‘Valhalla Mind-set’ — of wanting to die a soldier’s death while taking out as many Russians as possible,” the American said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for his safety. “I don’t want to put anybody down, but there was alienation they felt from what was going on in the world, and there wasn’t a place, or a system, for them outside of this.”

He added: “The kind of people that show up — everybody there was a romantic in some way, and a lot of them had their hearts broken. But all were also idealists who wanted to be part of something bigger than themselves.”

With the war now in its 11th month, those volunteers still in Ukraine tend to be highly committed, willing to withstand the winter conditions and to overcome the language barriers and cultural tensions that occasionally flare.

For some, the war in Ukraine presented a rare opportunity to make use of their training.

A 23-year-old former member of the British army’s Corps of Royal Engineers spent five years learning about demining and building trenches and bridges but never put that knowledge to use in a way that felt useful, he said. He spent time in Eastern Europe training foreign troops but found it tedious and pointless.

“To be completely honest, my main motivation for coming here really was to shoot at people and get shot up,” said the British soldier, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity. “I didn’t want to get my pension with never having done anything useful,” he said. Now, however, he says he is committed to the Ukrainian cause.

Not all the volunteers lacked options at home. When Russia invaded, Zachary Jaynes, 28, a recent graduate of Dartmouth College and former U.S. Army ranger, was about to start a meditation retreat in the Himalayan mountains.

His mother had died, his final year of college was spent during covid lockdowns and, like many Western veterans in Ukraine, he was disillusioned by his time in Afghanistan. He considered a job in consulting, but it did not seem appealing.

“There was this degree of emptiness and existential dread, of trying to move past my military history — and yet I found I also could not get beyond those experiences,” Jaynes said in an interview in Kyiv, where he was on a break from fighting in the south.

When the invasion began, it “felt like the breaking point,” he said. “I could either ignore what’s happening in Ukraine, and ignore this call for help, or I could dive back into the abyss completely to try to find the light.”

HEADLINE	01/18 Virologists under scrutiny: lab-leak fears
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2023/01/18/lab-leak-theory-virologist/
GIST	<p>BOSTON — The experiment probed a coronavirus mystery: Why is the omicron variant apparently less deadly than the original Wuhan strain?</p> <p>The researchers at Boston University’s National Emerging Infectious Disease Laboratories (the NEIDL, pronounced like “the needle”) created a new version of the virus, combining the spike protein that studs the surface of omicron with the backbone of the ancestral strain.</p> <p>The result: The “chimeric” virus was only a little less deadly than the Wuhan strain, killing 80 percent rather than 100 percent of laboratory mice that are particularly sensitive to the virus. But it was still much deadlier in these mice than omicron. This suggested that the spike protein wasn’t the only element of omicron making it less lethal. Another mutation had to be playing a role.</p> <p>On Oct. 14, the researchers posted an early draft of their results online. Such studies usually fly under the radar. Not this one.</p> <p><i>“Experts slam Boston lab where scientists have created a new deadly Omicron strain with an 80% kill rate in mice,”</i> blared a headline in the Daily Mail.</p> <p>Critics view pathogen research as the Wild West of science. Virologists have faced online abuse and even death threats amid fears that what they do is dangerous. Above all, conjectures that the coronavirus pandemic might have originated from secret laboratory research have cast a shadow over the field.</p> <p>Independent of that rancorous debate about covid’s origin, the National Institutes of Health is preparing an overhaul of the policies on government-funded research, with draft recommendations by its biosecurity board expected to be released Friday.</p> <p>The board’s recommendations, which could determine how virology experiments are conducted, will land in a politically charged environment. Republican leaders in the House of Representatives, leveraging their newly acquired subpoena power, have launched an investigation of the pandemic that will include the origin of covid and what they believe could be the involvement of American scientists and government officials.</p> <p>The “lab leak theory” has revived a durable cultural meme, that of the mad scientist, of human hubris creating things that nature would not. Virologists, in turn, argue that the assault on their integrity has potentially dire consequences for public health. Covid is still sickening and killing people across the planet. The natural world teems with pathogens that could create yet another plague.</p> <p>The editors of the journal of the American Society for Microbiology in December published an editorial warning that if scientists trying to protect humanity from the next pandemic continue to be viewed with suspicion, we will be “doomed to have pathogens control us, rather than vice versa.”</p> <p>To probe the coronavirus’s secrets requires experiments that may involve combining two strains and seeing what happens. The creation of recombinant or chimeric viruses in the laboratory is merely mimicking what happens naturally as viruses circulate, researchers say.</p> <p>“That’s what viruses do. That’s what scientists do,” said Ronald Corley, the chair of Boston University’s microbiology department and former director of NEIDL. What the scientists are definitely <i>not</i> trying to do, Corley quickly added, is “create scary viruses.”</p> <p>Questions about the origin of the pandemic have intensified a debate that had split the mainstream scientific community long before the coronavirus overtook the world: Where should scientists and</p>

government officials draw the line between pathogen research that is beneficial and that which is too risky?

More than a decade ago, experiments in the United States and the Netherlands created versions of the H5N1 influenza virus that could be more easily transmitted among ferrets, which have lungs similar to humans and are susceptible to influenza viruses. That ignited a furor over such “gain of function” research and whether the results should be published by the leading science journals. At the time, the biggest concern was not biosafety so much as *biosecurity* — keeping sensitive experimental data out of the [hands of terrorists](#) and rogue scientists.

The National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity warned of a possible “unimaginable catastrophe” and persuaded the journals to hold off on publishing. But the engineered viruses turned out to be [less dangerous](#) than originally feared. That controversy generated media attention but nowhere near the scale or ferocity of the covid origin debate.

Kristian Andersen, an infectious-disease researcher at Scripps Research, is among the scientists under attack by proponents of the lab leak theory. House Republicans have [demanded that he turn over](#) documents and communication about the origin of the coronavirus.

Andersen had initially suspected a lab leak when scrutinizing the novel coronavirus in early 2020, but upon further investigation, he and four colleagues wrote an influential article in the [journal Nature Medicine](#) concluding that SARS-CoV-2 was not engineered in a lab. He later co-authored two papers pointing to a natural viral spillover from animals sold [in a Wuhan market](#). But he and many colleagues have been pelted with accusations that they’re part of a coverup. That speculation helped generate a backlash against pathogen research and prompted Scripps to hire security for Andersen and his lab.

“The misinformation/disinformation environment” caught the experts by surprise, Andersen said.

“Unless we fix that, it doesn’t matter what else we do. People won’t take the vaccines, they won’t take the drugs that do work, they won’t take anything,” Andersen said. “I knew the world was crazy, but I hadn’t exactly realized how crazy.”

Corley argues that it is critical for researchers to listen to public concerns and do a better job explaining what scientists are doing and why they’re doing it. These pathogens are frightening, he freely admits. His laboratory, the NEIDL, ramped up operations only after a protracted legal battle with local activists who did not want it built in a densely populated city. It is one of a handful of research laboratories in the United States with biosafety level 4 containment, reserved for the study of the deadliest pathogens, like Ebola. (SARS-CoV-2 is studied in BSL-3 labs.)

The NEIDL is basically a fortress. Hundreds of security cameras are sprinkled through the building, along with motion sensors and retina scanners. The BSL-4 chambers are their own inner building that is nested within the larger structure. Air is filtered and refiltered. Researchers in the BSL-4 labs look like astronauts getting ready for a spacewalk — fully enclosed in biosafety suits, tethered to machines that pump air into their helmets.

“I feel safer working in this building than being out on the streets walking around,” said Corley, suggesting he would be more likely to catch a bad virus outside than while working among pathogens in his laboratory.

Corley said the chimeric virus experiment received several layers of institutional review, including from the university’s biosafety committee and the Boston Public Health Commission. Despite the controversy, the researchers forged ahead, and on Jan. 11 published their [peer-reviewed study](#) in the journal [Nature](#). The study identified a protein, nsp6, that plays a role in lessening the lethality of omicron compared with the ancestral strain.

Jesse Bloom, a computational biologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center who has supported investigations of a possible lab leak origin of the pandemic, said the Boston University experiment probably posed little risk of unleashing a dangerous variant into the general population. He noted that it used an early version of omicron, BA. 1, and so the recombinant virus would not have been able to compete against later, more transmissible subvariants of omicron.

Bloom said he is more concerned about experiments in laboratories across the world that involve the SARS coronavirus that began spreading in China in 2002. “If there were an accident with Sars-CoV-1, that would introduce into humans a virus that is very different from what is circulating now,” he said.

That virus spread from infected animals sold in a market, and many scientists have contended that SARS-CoV-2 most likely emerged the same way. There is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 was in a laboratory before the outbreak. Bloom, however, asserts that the [evidence for a market origin](#) for the current coronavirus pandemic is not conclusive, and both a laboratory origin and natural spillover should be viewed as possible causes of future pandemics.

“Whatever you think about the origin of SARS-CoV-2, people need to think about both of these risks and come up with ways to neutralize them,” he said.

Concerns about [pathogen research](#) reflect a reality about science and technology: They evolve rapidly, often chaotically and without high-level oversight or regulation.

New tools and innovations in the life sciences give researchers previously unimaginable powers to manipulate living things. That’s why the global scientific community took pains in recent years to create bright lines for the acceptable use of CRISPR, the revolutionary gene-editing technology developed roughly a decade ago.

Leaders of the NIH biosecurity advisory board say their nearly year-long effort to produce recommendations for pathogen research has been challenging as they try to balance the risks and benefits. “It’s like you’re doing a dance,” said Syra Madad, an infectious-disease epidemiologist who co-chairs one of the working groups for the biosecurity board.

The other co-chair, Gerald Parker, said “too onerous” restrictions on research could hurt American competitiveness in the life sciences. But Parker, speaking for himself and not for the biosecurity board, stressed the need to rebuild public trust in these contentious times. This is all the more important because of the global proliferation of laboratories studying dangerous pathogens, he said.

The pandemic exposed the obsolescence of current government rules on “potential pandemic pathogens,” which focus on infectious agents known to be highly lethal. But SARS-CoV-2 isn’t very deadly compared with many viruses. It’s just incredibly transmissible, and managed through its sheer contagiousness to create a global disaster. Thus the biosecurity board’s [preliminary recommendations](#) last fall said the guidelines should cover highly transmissible but not terribly lethal viruses, too.

Tom Inglesby, director of the Center for Health Security at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, maintains that the federal government must make a number of serious reforms in the oversight of risky experiments. Some of those experiments probably aren’t worth the risks, he said.

“I am *so* pro-research. I am *so* pro-science. I am *so* for figuring things out,” Inglesby said. But, he added, “When people say, well, we have to do this work to make pathogens more transmissible, it’ll help us fight the next pandemic, what I would say is: ‘You need to tell us exactly how it’s going to help us.’”

The cruelty of pathogens before the invention of vaccines, antibiotics and other interventions is a fading memory in the developed world, even as diseases like malaria and tuberculosis continue to kill millions of people a year in impoverished societies.

Life before modern medicine was inherently vulnerable to devastating illnesses that could strike swiftly and fatally. For many people, the only weapon against disease was prayer.

In the past century, scientific discoveries and new medical technologies have prolonged lives and defanged many of the ancient pathogens. That progress continues: The coronavirus pandemic heralded the coming of effective and flexible messenger RNA vaccines that may prove invaluable in the fight against many types of viruses.

And yet, three full years into the pandemic, scientists are still trying to understand what exactly makes SARS-CoV-2 so pernicious. Scientists have published thousands of research papers about mutations in the virus, but often don't know what those mutations do to the virus. They just know that natural selection — Darwinian evolution — is favoring the mutations for some reason.

"We know every protein, we know every [genomic] sequence, but we don't know what makes this virus spread better than others," said Susan Weiss, a virologist at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied coronaviruses for 42 years, having started out when coronavirus research was considered a scientific backwater.

Virologists were long focused on influenza as the likely cause of the next major pandemic. That's where the research dollars were. Until the 2002 SARS outbreak in China, only two coronaviruses were known to circulate in humans, and they caused colds.

"The sense of urgency to understand them was fairly low. Because you got kinda sick. And then you got better," said John Connor, a NEIDL scientist and co-author on the chimeric virus paper.

Peter Hotez, a vaccinologist at Baylor College of Medicine, notes that this century has already seen three outbreaks of disease caused by coronaviruses: SARS, then MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) in 2012, and covid in 2019.

Mother Nature "is not being coy with us. She's telling us exactly what she's going to do. She says, 'I'm hurling another coronavirus epidemic at you every 7 to 10 years,'" Hotez said. "Mother Nature is the most advanced, sophisticated weaponer ever invented."

It is not researchers who are posing the threat, he argues. He points to SARS-CoV-2: It spilled into the human species in late 2019 and was already very contagious — but not perfectly so. Evolution made it better. Then better again.

Variant begat variant, and here we are today, dealing with a potentially deadly virus that has found ways to evade human immunity — and is still evolving.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Data: 530 WA bridges 'poor' condition
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2023/01/wa-has-530-bridges-poor-condition-and-limited-repair-money
GIST	<p>A flashlight beam led the way as Colt Tatum maneuvered along a catwalk underneath the Heron Street Bridge in downtown Aberdeen. Wearing a bright orange jacket, he ducked under a row of dingy I-beams as vehicles rumbled overhead.</p> <p>Staying within a couple feet of the steel girders, the engineer and supervisor of special structures for the Washington State Department of Transportation slowly scanned the rivets connecting the deck to the piers. Unhurried, Tatum searched for signs of corrosion and cracks on the swing bridge.</p> <p>Bridge inspections often require squeezing into narrow spaces under substructures or dangling from a bucket truck below a bridge deck to get a closer look.</p>

“There's also a lot of action connected with our job,” said Tatum, one of 40 full-time inspectors at WSDOT who monitor about two-thirds of the roughly 10,000 bridges around the state. “We may be hanging hundreds of feet above the roadway or the water suspended from ropes to do our work.”

[Public inspection data](#) shows about 530 of the state's bridges are classified in “poor” condition, the agency's lowest assessment. In Grays Harbor County, where the Heron Street Bridge crosses the Wishkah River, records show even greater deterioration: Nearly one out of 10 bridges are listed in poor condition, including several highly trafficked spans near downtown Aberdeen and Hoquiam.

Delays in overdue repair or maintenance work can lead to emergency closures that sometimes have deep economic repercussions for communities and businesses. A [\\$605 million boost](#) in federal funds that began flowing into Washington last year will help the state make a dent in its growing list of bridge maintenance and replacement work.

But even with additional money from the \$1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law on top of what the state already invests each year, officials say it still won't be enough to address all of Washington's bridges rated in poor condition.

Just catching up on repairs to state-owned bridges, transportation officials estimate, would take more than \$150 million annually.

“We assume the backlog will remain,” WSDOT spokesperson Christina Werner said, “and, without a new fund source, will increase.”

A path across

Swirling through Grays Harbor County, river channels and waterways define the region. The Chehalis River and its tributaries bisect the area, snaking among cities that sprung up during the booming timber days and emptying into the Pacific Ocean. Concrete, steel and sometimes wooden bridges serve as essential connections of both people and place.

“To have that much water means you've got some barriers that you're not easily able to traverse if you're looking to go overland,” said John Larson, director of the Polson Museum in Hoquiam. “You're going to need to put a bridge here and there to make yourself float, to make yourself be able to move from point A to point B.”

Today, a variety of structures dot the county's landscape: Bascule bridges use counterweights to open a center span, swing bridges rotate to allow boats to pass, and a vertical lift bridge rises like an elevator. The constraints of a particular location combined with inventive engineering have erected a unique assortment over the past century.

In the county's largest city, WSDOT's Tatum scrutinized each beam supporting the Heron Street Bridge, one of Aberdeen's busiest crossings. He examined a previous repair that welded a T-shaped steel piece to shore up a fissure on a beam that connects the substructure to the deck. He kept careful not to stray too far from the steel girders.

“They tell you to be at arm's reach, then you're pretty well guaranteed you're gonna see everything that's up there,” he said. “It makes you slow down and really look at the structure.”

Every bridge receives an inspection roughly every two years. Crews typically examine three areas: the superstructure, which includes the deck and supporting girders; the substructure or foundational elements; and any mechanical parts if it's a movable bridge. Inspection teams often check 20 to 30 structures a week, which can take anywhere from a few hours to several days each to complete depending on the size of the bridge and crew.

Any number of things can cause deterioration, Tatum said. The number of vehicles moving across a bridge each day, water seeping into cracks or the movement of rivers underneath the bridge can all wear on its structure.

But, he noted, not all cracks indicate a problem.

“A stable crack that's not changing at all is going to be inherently of lesser concern than a crack that is opening up and changing over time,” Tatum said. “But certainly if it is a quarter-inch two years ago and three inches now, that crack has grown substantially. That's something that we need to be very keyed into.”

WSDOT uses past reports to check for growth by measuring, photographing and tracing cracks with paint.

Seattleites, particularly those in West Seattle, are very familiar with precarious cracks. Rapidly growing fractures unexpectedly closed, in 2020, the high bridge that connected the peninsula to the rest of the city. This emergency closure happened as stay-at-home orders came down in the early days of the pandemic. The city spent two years scrambling to repair the bridge.

After repairs, the bridge's rating is listed as fair. In King County, just under 5% of the roughly 1,700 bridges are considered to be in poor condition.

A separate team inspects bridges' substructures checking for scour — the action of the river channel washing material away and eating away the foundation. Scour can also be the addition of material being deposited around pilings.

Scour put the Simpson Avenue Bridge in Hoquiam out of commission in 2010 after deterioration on its timber pilings went unnoticed for years. The emergency closure lasted about six months on a major route used by locals, clam diggers and tourists headed for Washington coastal beaches. Today the bridge, rated in poor condition, once again needs repairs.

“It's the primary issue across the board that's caused bridge failures,” Tatum explained. “Rivers are tremendously powerful and they're always moving. So you always have that potential to erode the foundations.”

Backlog of repairs

WSDOT monitors roughly 7,300 bridges around the state. The agency owns about half of those, contracting with over 100 local municipalities to inspect the others. Local city or county crews handle the rest.

All agencies inspecting bridges in Washington follow the same basic process, outlined in detail in WSDOT's manual. Once an inspection is completed, the deck — the superstructure that supports the roadway and the substructure — is given a numerical score, which is then compiled into an overall condition rating.

A nine or an eight indicates the bridge is in excellent condition, according to Roman Peralta, co-chair of WSDOT's Bridge Preservation Office; a zero score closes the bridge. A bridge with a rating of 4 or less is given a rating of poor. The inspection team then makes repair recommendations, which could include preservation or replacement.

Of Washington's 39 counties, Grays Harbor has the sixth highest percentage of bridges rated in poor condition. Some counties have an even greater backlog of bridge maintenance — in Pend Oreille and Stevens counties, roughly one out of six bridges is rated as poor. Island and San Juan counties, meanwhile, each with fewer than 15 bridges total, have none rated in poor condition.

Overall, 17 Washington counties have at least 5% of their bridges deemed in poor condition.

A rating of poor doesn't mean it's unsafe or structurally deficient, Peralta said. The agency has protocols for immediately shutting down bridges considered unsafe or at risk of failure based on the inspections and accompanied analysis.

Generally, a lower rating places a bridge higher on the repair or replacement list, Peralta explained. When its rating drops into the poor category, a bridge becomes eligible for replacement.

The goal is for WSDOT to address the needs of all bridges rated in poor condition or in need of maintenance work, Peralta said, so crews can focus on preventative work.

But that day is still long in the future, despite the \$605.1 million flowing into Washington from the [Bridge Formula program](#) rolled up in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Touted as "[the single largest dedicated bridge investment since the construction of the interstate highway system](#)," the program is sending \$27.5 billion to states for bridge rehabilitation, preservation or replacement work.

The federal government requires that 75% of this funding must go to bridges classified in poor condition. Another \$12.5 billion from the bill will be available through a competitive grant process.

The Washington Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee [decided last year that 61%](#) of the state's portion of the federal money will go to state-owned bridges. The rest will head to cities and counties.

Despite an additional \$369 million boost for state-owned bridges, a 60% funding gap will still exist, according to Werner at WSDOT, "given that WSDOT is annually short approximately \$150-\$200 million in bridge preservation funding compared to needs," she wrote in an email.

Werner explained that for the portion of federal money going to state-owned bridges, priority will be given to bridges crossing state lines, movable bridges, those on strategic freight routes and those with the highest daily truck traffic.

[WSDOT's Local Programs Office](#) will administer the local funds over the next five years. According to the program's latest call for projects, bridges with a deck, superstructure, or substructures with a rating of 4 or less were eligible for the funding.

Fabric of a community

Rebuilt several times, remnants [of past Heron Street Bridges](#) sit among the piers supporting the current one in downtown Aberdeen. The swing bridge sits parallel to the Wishkah River Bridge, a bascule-style structure constructed in 1925 which carries traffic heading the opposite direction. They have carried timber, freight and tourists across the Wishkah River, a tributary of the Chehalis that cuts through Aberdeen, for decades.

Larson, the Hoquiam museum director, said he hopes many of these old bridges stick around. They have become part of the fabric of a community.

"You see structures like that being built, because people had this upward and onward vision of how they anticipated their communities to grow," he said. "Now if you're a bean counter on the maintenance side of things on a bridge, you're gonna look at preserving a bridge as a much cheaper option than tearing it down and building a brand-new bridge."

Both the Heron Street and Wishkah River bridges are now rated in poor condition. Hoping to avert last-minute repairs on one of the county's most trafficked crossings, the Wishkah River Bridge is scheduled for maintenance on its [mechanical components](#) in the summer of 2025. The Heron Street Bridge is on the list for replacement but no date has been set, according to WSDOT.

While the bridges of Grays Harbor no longer open as frequently for large timber shipments or other maritime traffic, the county's cities increasingly rely on bridges to carry goods or tourists to the beach.

	<p>A closure can mean long detours for drivers. And emergency closures give cities little time to plan or businesses to prepare.</p> <p>The critical connections that bridges provide are perhaps never more apparent than when they're gone.</p> <p>Last May, WSDOT closed one lane of the Grass Creek Bridge along State Route 109, a key link between Hoquiam and Ocean Shores, after inspectors found advanced degradation of timber pilings under the southbound lane of the bridge.</p> <p>The lane closure happened on Lytle Seafoods' doorstep just as the oyster farm's busiest season began. Their waterside shack sits less than 300 feet from the Grass Creek Bridge.</p> <p>Owner Mike Lytle said that on busy summer days, it took cars 30 minutes to get through the one-way closure.</p> <p>"They didn't want to turn in here cause they figured they were going to get stuck," he said.</p> <p>And as holiday shopping ramped up, the state started repairs on the bridge, closing it entirely and rerouting cars along a 13-mile detour. Work was scheduled to last up to 10 weeks, but crews wrapped up early and WSDOT reopened in the middle of January. Lytle's December business was a fraction of that of last year. He said he hadn't bothered opening on the weekends.</p> <p>"It's killing business," he said in an interview during the recent closure. "I get one or two people a day if I'm lucky. ... There's no reason to be open, there are no customers."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Russia: nuclear underwater drone 'ready'
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkg5w9/russia-says-its-unstoppable-nuclear-underwater-drone-is-ready-to-go
GIST	<p>Russia has finished building its first batch of "nuclear-capable underwater drone" torpedoes nicknamed Poseidon, according to state-owned news agency TASS. According to TASS, Poseidon is meant to be used in Russia's new nuclear-powered <i>Belgorod</i> submarine. Billed as an unstoppable super torpedo by both Putin and some Western news outlets, the Poseidon is another unknown and unproven Russian weapon.</p> <p>Poseidon is NATO's name for Russia's Status-6 Oceanic Multipurpose System, a new kind of underwater drone capable of carrying both nuclear and conventional warheads. TASS, citing an anonymous source, said that the new weapon was finished and would soon be delivered to a Russian submarine.</p> <p>Little is actually known about the mysterious weapon and its capabilities. According to Russian sources and Western intelligence, it's enormous. It weighs more than 200,000 pounds, has a diameter of around 6 feet, and a length of more than 60 feet. It's so big that the <i>Belgorod</i> can only carry six of them. This would make it the largest torpedo ever developed and deployed by any country in the world.</p> <p>The world first caught a glimpse of the Poseidon thanks to a 2015 leak that showed off the weapons the Kremlin planned to deploy with the <i>Belgorod</i>. The giant torpedo seems to be unwieldy, an enormous torpedo that uses a nuclear engine to carry it vast distances. Its size and nuclear signature might make it easy to track, but it would be hard to know until one was fired. It's also important to note that though this weapon has been billed as capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, there's no confirmation that the ones that have been produced are carrying one.</p> <p>Putin first revealed the torpedoes to the world during a 2018 presentation to the Federal Assembly, Russia's legislative body. During the speech he announced the development of four new nuclear weapons and demonstrated their use by showing a CGI video of a nuke hitting Mar-a-Lago. Along with the Poseidon, Putin also teased the RS-28 "Satan II" Sarmat intercontinental-ballistic missile (ICBM), the Zircon hypersonic missile, and a nuclear powered cruise missile called the SSC-X-9 Skyfall.</p>

	<p>According to the Kremlin, work on these new nuclear weapons has borne fruit. It said it tested a launch of the Satan II in April, 2022. Earlier this month, it announced that it had deployed the Zircon hypersonic missile on a ship that planned to tour the world's seas.</p> <p>The Skyfall and Poseidon have remained more mysterious and TASS provided no official confirmation from the Russian Ministry of Defense about the completion of the torpedo's construction. When the Zircon was shipped out a few weeks ago, both Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced it publicly. Neither have recently mentioned the Poseidon or Skyfall.</p> <p>Both the Poseidon and Skyfall are said to use nuclear-powered engines to drive them. It's a weapon idea that the U.S. also attempted to develop in the 1960s but abandoned after increasing concerns about, among other things, radioactive emissions caused by the engine. Unless Russia has developed a new kind of shielding for the Skyfall and Poseidon's engines, there's a chance the weapons will spew radioactive material in their wake once fired. This kind of uncontrolled spew was too much of a risk even for the Americans at the height of nuclear development.</p> <p>In 2019, a nuclear accident at a Russian facility in the Arctic killed 7 people. Moscow claimed the accident was the result of a small nuclear reactor explosion. The evidence, however, indicated that the Kremlin was testing a Skyfall missile and something had gone wrong. Now, it appears a similar weapon, with similar issues, will soon be deployed on a Russian submarine.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 State Dept. picks new official typeface
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2023/01/times-for-a-change-state-department-picks-a-new-official-typeface/
GIST	<p>Official correspondence from America's diplomats is getting a bit of a spruce-up next month. From February 6, the US Department of State will adopt Microsoft's sans serif Calibri in 14-point size "for all paper submitted to the Executive Secretariat," according to The Washington Post's diplomacy reporter John Hudson.</p> <p>The move sparked a somewhat tendentious discussion in the Ars virtual office earlier today. In the cable, the State Department refers to Times New Roman and Calibri as fonts. But teeeeeeechnically, it should have referred to Times New Roman and Calibri as <i>typefaces</i>. A font, rather, is how you manipulate that typeface—changing the size or weight, the character spacing, or making it italic, for example.</p> <p>"If we're being pedantic (AND I AM!), a font is a clade of a typeface, I think? And yes, while switching typefaces might mean you are also switching the style of text you're using, it's not a semantically meaningful phrase," said a rather pedantic colleague.</p> <p>But as a less-pedantic colleague pointed out, "This is one of those glasses pushing up things that people who work with it all ignore on a regular basis."</p> <p>A third blamed the confusion on early word processors, "which listed different typefaces as 'fonts' and fonts as 'font styles.'"</p> <p>Other parts of the federal government have previously expressed preferences regarding typefaces. If you're submitting a grant to the National Institutes of Health, for instance, there are some rules and guidelines on how to format that application.</p> <p>Nothing smaller than 11-point text, no more than 15 characters per linear inch, and no more than six lines per vertical inch are allowed to prevent loquacious investigators from trying to fit a dissertation into an R01. For typefaces, Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, and Palatino Linotype are recommended but not required—our nation's leading biomedical research funding agency is ambivalent about serifs versus sans serifs, apparently.</p>

Aesthetics were not the primary reason for this change. [In The Washington Post](#), Hudson writes that "[t]he secretary's decision was motivated by accessibility issues and not aesthetics, said a senior State Department official familiar with the change." Sans serif typefaces are easier to read than their more baroque relatives, particularly on a screen. Additionally, sans serif fonts are less likely to create problems for people who need to use optical character recognition and text-to-speech tools.

Calibri is a relatively new typeface, arriving at the turn of the century from Dutch type designer Lucas de Groot. In 2007, it replaced Times New Roman as the default typeface for Microsoft Word in recognition that, going forward, most documents would be read on screens rather than print.

In January, Secretary Antony Blinken [directed his staff to find a more accessible typeface](#), and as the default sans serif typeface in Microsoft Office, Calibri was obviously appealing. Calibri might not be the default Microsoft Word font forever, though. [In 2021 we learned](#) that the company was already searching for replacements.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Homeland security threat from China
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/column-addressing-the-homeland-security-threat-from-china/
GIST	<p>Last month, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas provided significant remarks on his vision for homeland security. One of the key themes of Mayorkas' speech was the convergence of national security and homeland security. As the Secretary said, "The historical distinction between homeland security and national security challenges has blurred and the role of DHS has grown accordingly."</p> <p>One implication of this idea is that adversaries which present national security threats to the United States also present homeland security threats and that foreign threats have domestic implications. This concept certainly guided much of the planning that the department did with the interagency in early 2022 related to the illegal Russian attack of Ukraine, an effort that is being instantiated via the development of homeland security doctrine. Having the capacity to address national security risks with domestic security responses has become an integral part of the homeland security mission.</p> <p>This capacity is important not just to address the threats of spillover from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, however, but also for additional nation-states that are strategic adversaries of the United States. This, of course, includes China and the threat of heightened tensions caused by Chinese government actions.</p> <p>The Chinese government is already engaged in activities intended to undermine U.S. national interests. As part of the response to that, the House of Representatives just voted in a bipartisan manner to establish a Select Committee on China, chaired by Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.), with a broad remit to address China as a threat to the United States. In Gallagher's words, the committee will expose China's "coordinated whole-of-society strategy to undermine American leadership and American sovereignty." It is a positive sign that both the Executive and Legislative branches recognize the importance of addressing China as a homeland security threat.</p> <p>There is still work to be done, however, to flesh out what exactly that means and how best to address the threat. The homeland threat from China can be viewed through several overlapping lenses. The first is the cybersecurity threat, which is perhaps the most immediate and constant. As the U.S. government has attributed, Chinese state actors have breached managed service providers, done active screening of U.S. critical infrastructure including the energy sector, and stolen personal identifiable information. The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has a good overview of the Chinese cyber threat.</p> <p>Much of the cybersecurity threat arises from Chinese companies' access to supply chains, particularly information and communications technology supply chains. Chinese communications companies, whether state-owned or state-influenced, have manufactured equipment with proven vulnerabilities and there is evidence that those companies are being used as ways to access sensitive information.</p>

Supply chain insecurity is exacerbated by intentional foreign investment in critical and sensitive industries. The last decade has seen a surge in foreign direct investment from China to the United States which, although it has leveled off, remains historically high. The administration has recognized much of this investment is focused on acquiring critical technologies or infrastructure that could affect U.S. national security. Access to emerging technologies by the Chinese government and firms, as well as other R&D, presents a particular risk when used nefariously. Chief among those are quantum computing and artificial intelligence, where the pace of evolution is going to create new security risks.

And, finally, there is the element of espionage and pushing of disinformation by the Chinese government – both economic and other – to capture sensitive information and undermine national interests.

When you look at the cumulative threat picture from China, therefore, you see one largely realized through economic and technological means with risk that has been amplified over the past 20 years because of economic and technological interconnectedness.

This leads to a logical conclusion that to manage the risk that China presents to homeland security, there must be an element of unraveling this interconnectedness. Much of the policy discussion has been focused on whether to ban or restrict certain companies or applications from the market – think the recent efforts around restrictions on Huawei and ZTE communications’ infrastructure and products, as well as the ongoing question on what to do with TikTok – but the reality is that banning certain companies cannot be the only policy response. It is difficult to keep up with the pace of Chinese-linked entities that may or may not be acting to undermine security nor, for that matter, to develop airtight evidence that companies are doing so. Technological solutions are necessary to do so. And, while targeted restrictions can be good policy, so too are efforts to continue to incentivize and stimulate alternatives to Chinese technologies, goods, and materials as well as continuing to manage risks through adoption of something akin to “zero trust” principals that are gaining traction in the cybersecurity community for doing business with Chinese-linked enterprises.

There also needs to be a reckoning by individual corporations, nonprofits and governments about risks from entering into business relationships with companies unduly influenced by the Chinese government and relying on untrustworthy Chinese technology and supplies. While there are many regulations in place meant to limit those relationships, businesses (and for that matter nonprofits, such as universities) should not simply take a posture of making decisions about reliance on Chinese-influenced entities based on whether there is a restriction now. Lowering risk tolerances related to Chinese influence is necessary.

Of course, interconnectedness with China is not the only source of homeland security risk. There are also more acute risks stemming from potential conflicts in East Asia, particularly in Taiwan, or more aggressive efforts by the Chinese government to go after American critical infrastructure. Consistent contingency planning for those scenarios and capacity building is needed and DHS is well suited to work with the Department of Defense and others to do that work. That contingency planning is made easier, however, if the baseline of U.S. reliance on Chinese goods and materials is reduced.

It is tempting to use the language of the Cold War when talking about the future of U.S.-China conflict but “war,” whether cold or hot, does not have to be the outcome between the two countries. An end state that is more akin to creating layers of autonomy where American security and economic interests are not subordinate to Chinese threats needs to be the goal. This won’t just happen, however, and clear leadership from the federal government on the scale of the threat of China to the homeland is welcome.

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HEADLINE	01/18 WHO analyzes hybrid immunity protection
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-18/who-analysis-hybrid-immunity-offers-high-protection-against-covid-19-hospitalization

GIST	<p>Those who are vaccinated against COVID-19 and have been infected have a very high level of protection against hospitalization and severe disease a year after their most recent infection or shot, according to a new analysis led by the World Health Organization.</p> <p>Hybrid immunity – the mix of protection provided by COVID-19 vaccination as well as infection – was over 97% effective at preventing hospitalization and severe COVID-19 among fully vaccinated individuals a year after their most recent infection or vaccination, according to the analysis published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases on Wednesday.</p> <p>Protection against infection, however, waned to nearly 42% a year after developing hybrid immunity for those with a primary vaccination series, the analysis of more than two dozen studies found. Those who got a COVID-19 booster shot as well had more than 46% effectiveness against infection six months after the shot.</p> <p>The analysis also looked at unvaccinated individuals who were infected with COVID-19 and found that their protection against hospitalization and severe COVID-19 also remained relatively high one year after infection, while protection against infection also waned. For those with previous infection and no vaccinations, effectiveness against hospitalization and severe disease was nearly 75% a year out, while protection against infection was less than 25%.</p> <p>“The analysis shows that hybrid immunity provides higher protection, demonstrating the advantages of vaccination even after people have had COVID-19,” WHO said in a statement.</p> <p>The analysis suggested that such data could be used to tailor booster shot guidance, adding that booster campaigns could be timed before an expected surge in COVID-19 activity.</p> <p>“Individuals with hybrid immunity had the highest magnitude and durability of protection, and as a result might be able to extend the period before booster vaccinations are needed compared to individuals who have never been infected,” the analysis said.</p> <p>It said that “given the waning protection for both infection-induced and vaccine-induced immunity against SARS-CoV-2 infection or reinfection, wider vaccination among populations could be timed for rollout before periods of expected increased incidence, such as the winter season.”</p> <p>Additionally, the analysis suggested that a six-month delay for the booster dose “might be justified after the last infection or vaccination for individuals with a known history of previous infection and full primary series vaccination.”</p> <p>The data comes as the Food and Drug Administration’s committee of outside vaccine experts are set to talk about the COVID-19 booster strategy next week.</p> <p>“Since the initial authorizations of these vaccines, we have learned that protection wanes over time, especially as the virus rapidly mutates and new variants and subvariants emerge,” FDA’s Peter Marks said in a statement announcing the meeting on Jan. 26. “Therefore, it’s important to continue discussions about the optimal composition of COVID-19 vaccines for primary and booster vaccination, as well as the optimal interval for booster vaccination.”</p> <p>The Biden administration has already floated the idea of an annual COVID-19 booster, but such a plan still faces many questions, including what the makeup of the shot should be and when it should be offered.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Day 330 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/19/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-330-of-the-invasion

- **Volodymyr Zelenskiy has [stepped up calls for Ukraine's army to be supplied with heavy tanks](#)** and urged “resolve and speed” of decision-making from western allies. Addressing a packed gathering at the World Economic Forum in Davos [via video link](#) on Wednesday, Ukraine's president warned that “tyranny is outpacing democracy”.
- **Nato countries are set to announce new “heavier weapons” for Ukraine**, the alliance's chief has said. Many of Ukraine's allies will meet on Friday at the Ramstein military base in Germany, including all 30 Nato members. “The main message there will be more support and more advanced support, heavier weapons and more modern weapons,” said Jens Stoltenberg, the alliance's secretary general. This month Britain pledged western heavy tanks and the US promised to send its powerful Bradley armoured fighting vehicles, while France offered its highly mobile AMX-10 RCs.
- **The European Union's head also spoke in favour of the west providing tanks to Ukraine.** “We, the EU, will continue to support them for as long as it takes,” Charles Michel, the European Council president, said on Wednesday. “The time is now – they urgently need more equipment and I am personally in favour of supplying tanks to Ukraine.”
- **Germany's chancellor [avoided committing to the supply of Leopard 2 tanks](#) to Ukraine.** Olaf Scholz did not mention the Leopard tanks when a Ukrainian delegate asked him “why the hesitancy” in signing off their re-export at the Davos summit. The German leader said his country was “strategically interlocked” with the US, France and other “friends and partners”, and that any decisions about weapons had to be part of a collective effort to help Ukraine win the war. The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper later reported that Scholz had spoken with the US president, Joe Biden, and “made it clear that Germany could only give in to the pressure to deliver if the US delivered Abrams battle tanks”. The US was not prepared to provide the advanced Abrams tanks to Ukraine, a senior Pentagon official said on Wednesday, citing difficulties in maintenance and training.
- **Canada announced it would donate 200 armoured personnel carriers to Ukraine.** [The move](#) came during a visit to Kyiv by Canada's defence minister, Anita Anand. Zelenskiy thanked the Canadian people and its prime minister, Justin Trudeau, “on this difficult day”.
- **Bulgaria helped Ukraine survive Russia's early onslaught by [secretly supplying it with large amounts of desperately needed diesel and ammunition](#),** the politicians responsible have said. The former Bulgarian prime minister Kiril Petkov and finance minister Assen Vassilev said their country – one of the poorest EU members and long perceived as pro-Moscow – provided 30% of the Soviet-calibre ammunition Ukraine's army needed during a crucial three-month period last spring, and at times 40% of the diesel.
- **Poland's president has warned that Russia [could be planning a new offensive in the coming months](#),** calling on countries to provide Ukraine with “weapons, weapons, weapons”. Andrzej Duda told delegates at the World Economic Forum in Davos that Russia was still strong and that more action was needed to support Ukraine, saying current levels of assistance were inadequate.
- **Volodymyr Zelenskiy has written a letter inviting the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, for talks,** which was handed to the Chinese delegation in Davos, said the Ukrainian leader's wife, Olena Zelenska. “It was a gesture and invitation to dialogue and I hope very much that there will be a response to this invitation,” she told reporters on Wednesday. China has sought to position itself as neutral in the war, while at the same time deepening ties with Moscow.
- **Ukraine reported intense fighting overnight in the east of the country,** where both sides have taken huge losses for little gain in intense trench warfare over the past two months. Ukrainian forces repelled attacks in the eastern city of Bakhmut and the nearby village of Klishchiivka, the Ukrainian military said. Russia has focused on Bakhmut in recent weeks, claiming last week to have taken the [mining town of Soledar](#) on its northern outskirts. “We notice a gradual increase in the number of shelling occasions and attempts at offensive actions by the occupiers,” Zelenskiy said in his latest [address](#).
- **Vladimir Putin has said he has “no doubt” that Russia's victory in Ukraine is “inevitable”.** He [announced](#) that Russia's military-industrial complex was ramping up production during a visit to a factory in St Petersburg. In a separate speech, the Russian president also claimed Moscow's actions in Ukraine were intended [to stop a “war”](#) that had been raging in eastern Ukraine for many years. Ukraine and the west have rejected Putin's stated objectives of

	<p>demilitarising and “denazifying” Ukraine as a pretext for a war of choice and unprovoked aggression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four people have been detained by Moscow police at a makeshift memorial dedicated to victims of Saturday’s deadly missile strike on a residential building in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro, according to a report. People began placing flowers at the statue of Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka in a “spontaneous memorial in memory of the victims of the missile strike in Dnipro”, the independent Russian human rights monitor OVD-Info said.
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HEADLINE	01/19 India kite flying festival: kites kill 6
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/19/three-children-among-six-killed-during-indian-kite-flying-festival
GIST	<p>Six people, including three children, have died after their throats were cut by glass-coated kite strings during an annual kite-flying festival in India.</p> <p>Hundreds flocked to terraces and rooftops to unfurl their kites towards the sky at the Uttarayan festival in the western Indian state of Gujarat over the weekend.</p> <p>The victims reportedly bled to death when the razor-sharp kite strings became entangled around their necks, officials told the Press Trust of India (PTI). At least another 176 people were injured due to cuts and falls.</p> <p>Some participants are known to coat their kite strings with powdered glass in order to slice their opponent’s cords while in the air. Although the practice has been banned since 2016, critics say it is rarely enforced.</p> <p>A two-year-old girl reportedly died after a kite string struck her neck while riding on a scooter with her father, PTI cited an official from Bortalav police station as saying.</p> <p>The girl, known only as Kirti, is said to have died during treatment at a hospital on Sunday.</p> <p>Another girl, aged three, was walking home with her mother in Visnagar town on Saturday when a string cut her neck. She was taken to hospital but was declared dead on arrival, a Visnagar police official said.</p> <p>Rishabh Verma, a seven-year-old boy riding on a scooter with his parents, was also struck by a string in Rajkot, an official from Aji Dam police station said.</p> <p>According to police, similar incidents were reported in Vadodara, Kutch and Gandhinagar districts, where three men were killed in similar circumstances.</p> <p>Nikunj Sharma, a campaigner for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) India, previously told the Guardian the use of manja, the nylon string used to fly kites instead of cotton, could make injuries severe. “Unlike cotton strings these are non-biodegradable, don’t break easily and continue to cause injuries months after the festival,” Sharma said.</p> <p>In Ahmedabad, Gujarat’s largest city, the police department warned against using the coated kites at the festival.</p> <p>“Do not use deadly Chinese manja to fly kites,” it said. Police urged participants to be careful while flying kites during the festival, saying the “momentary fun” of cutting another kite could come at the cost of someone’s life.</p> <p>However, Jayesh Shinde, an activist campaigning against the use of manja, said the government had failed to uphold the ban and should compensate victims for their treatment.</p>

	<p>“Citizens should not have to pay for the lackadaisical attitude of the government machinery. If the official ban is not being implemented, then the government should offer compensation to victims,” the Times of India quoted Shinde as saying.</p> <p>The popular festival marks the onset of spring where kite-flying is often used during celebrations across the country.</p> <p>Hundreds of birds also fly into the kite strings or are entangled in them, causing deep cuts to their wings, nerve injuries, fractures, dislocations and, in many cases, death.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Russian spy or Ukrainian hero?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-spy-or-ukrainian-hero-the-strange-death-of-denys-kiryehev-11674059395?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>Days after Russia’s invasion, Ukrainian intelligence agents left a corpse on a sidewalk in the center of Kyiv with a bullet hole in the back of the skull.</p> <p>The dead man, 45-year-old banker Denys Kiryeyev, was killed as a traitor. The Security Service of Ukraine—the country’s primary domestic intelligence agency, known as the SBU—shot Mr. Kiryeyev because he was allegedly spying for Moscow, an agency official said.</p> <p>Yet days after Mr. Kiryeyev’s body was dumped, he was buried a hero and interred next to Ukraine’s first foreign minister. According to Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukraine’s military intelligence agency, Mr. Kiryeyev had passed on information from his Russian contacts that helped Ukrainian forces successfully defend their capital city last February. “If it were not for Mr. Kiryeyev, most likely Kyiv would have been taken,” the general said.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed papers to award Mr. Kiryeyev a posthumous medal for “exceptional duty in defense of state sovereignty and state security.”</p> <p>For years, Russia invested the equivalent of billions of dollars to infiltrate Ukraine’s political and intelligence circles, seeking to divide loyalties within Ukraine’s spy agencies and to establish a network of agents should Moscow decide to attempt to seize the country. Past decades of political corruption also eroded public trust. Russian officials didn’t respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Mr. Kiryeyev at various times appeared to belong to each of the opposing camps. He had traded a career at Western financial institutions to manage money and assets for two wealthy brothers who had close ties to Russia-aligned Ukrainian politicians. The work paid for Mr. Kiryeyev’s real estate, a fleet of cars and vacations in Greece and Paris. It also cast a shadow on his reputation among officials and colleagues worried about Russian influence.</p> <p>Later in his career, Gen. Budanov said, Mr. Kiryeyev had cultivated ties with European intelligence services, as well as with Russian military and government officials. He also agreed to represent Kyiv in early cease-fire talks between Russia and Ukraine, a risky, high-profile assignment. Mr. Kiryeyev “enjoyed playing the 007 role,” a friend said.</p> <p>The Feb. 24 invasion tested Russia’s investment and Ukraine’s resistance. Mr. Kiryeyev, who had a foot in both countries, was caught in the middle.</p> <p>This article was based on financial and intelligence documents and interviews with U.S. and Ukrainian government officials, current and former members of Ukrainian security agencies, as well as Mr. Kiryeyev’s family, friends, bodyguards and business associates.</p> <p>Moneymaking</p>

Mr. Kiryeyev was born in Kyiv and began his professional life in finance working at the local offices of Western banks, including Crédit Lyonnais, Citibank and ING.

He was thickset and outgoing, and he skillfully handled clients, according to people who worked with him. Mr. Kiryeyev spoke Ukrainian, Russian, French and English.

A relative of his in 2003 became deputy chief of the SBU, Ukraine's main successor to the Soviet-era KGB, according to a former head of the agency. The connection kindled Mr. Kiryeyev's interest in espionage, associates said. Critics allege the SBU, now facing government scrutiny, has long been under Moscow's influence. The agency, which declined to comment, has denied the claim.

In 2006, Mr. Kiryeyev went to work for Andriy Klyuyev and Serhiy Klyuyev, politically connected businessmen from Donetsk, a Russian-leaning region of eastern Ukraine. The Klyuyev brothers, who built their wealth in metals and real estate, were close to Viktor Yanukovich, a politician with Russian ties who would later become Ukraine's president.

In 2015, the U.S. sanctioned Andriy Klyuyev for his alleged efforts to undermine democracy in Ukraine. Neither he nor Serhiy Klyuyev could be reached for comment.

Mr. Kiryeyev's widow said her husband had given her a loose explanation for his decision to work with people in Mr. Yanukovich's circle. "We can't exchange these people for other people. We have what we have," she recalled him saying.

During Mr. Yanukovich's presidency, Andriy Klyuyev served as secretary of Ukraine's national security and defense council, as well as first deputy prime minister. Mr. Kiryeyev benefited from the Klyuyevs' connections, taking senior positions at state-owned banks and hunting big game with SBU intelligence chiefs in the Carpathian Mountains, according to associates. He traveled with bodyguards he hired from an elite SBU unit.

Over the years, Mr. Kiryeyev established cross-border connections. On Russia's Navy Day, he hobnobbed in Crimea with generals from the Russian security services and knew many of them by their first names, according to a friend who joined him there.

In 2014, a citizen uprising against Russia's political influence plunged Ukraine into a crisis. Violent protests erupted in Kyiv, and Mr. Yanukovich fled to Russia, along with the head of the SBU and more than a dozen top agency officials. The Klyuyev brothers also relocated to Russia, and Mr. Kiryeyev helped to manage some of their assets from Kyiv, according to Mr. Kiryeyev's associates.

During the chaos, Russia seized Crimea and stirred rebellion in Ukraine's east. After war erupted between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed militias, Mr. Kiryeyev bought equipment for volunteer brigades fighting on behalf of Kyiv, according to his security chief. He bemoaned to friends and family Ukraine's inability to reach its potential while hobbled by its powerful neighbor.

When Mr. Zelensky was elected president in 2019, Mr. Kiryeyev was on a shortlist to head a large, state-controlled bank but missed out on the post, according to his widow and banking colleagues. News articles and TV reports raised questions about his loyalty to the country. Mr. Kiryeyev's widow said he dismissed the reports as slander.

In 2021, Mr. Kiryeyev's spot in the intersecting spheres of Russian and Ukrainian business and security drew the attention of Gen. Budanov, at the time the recently appointed head of Ukraine's military intelligence agency, known as the GUR.

'I won't go'

Years earlier, Gen. Budanov, a former commando, had spent time recovering from a war wound at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland. He became acquainted with U.S. intelligence

officials. In time, he earned the reputation as a reliable interlocutor and counterweight to Russian influence in the SBU, according to a former senior U.S. official.

As Russia began amassing troops on the Ukraine border in the spring of 2021, Gen. Budanov said he summoned Mr. Kiryeyev to Ukraine's military intelligence headquarters, a compound known as The Island and located on a peninsula along Kyiv's Dnipro River.

Gen. Budanov appealed to Mr. Kiryeyev's patriotism, he said, and asked him to use his financial and security contacts to try to infiltrate Russia's military intelligence. "He had the necessary circle of acquaintances. Financial transactions were carried out through him," the general said. "That's why he had communication with everyone, including very influential people."

Mr. Kiryeyev agreed to go along, motivated by duty and his fascination with the world of secret operations. A security team began driving Mr. Kiryeyev to Kharkiv, 300 miles east of Kyiv. There, he and another Ukrainian intelligence operative would take a separate car across the border, according to Gen. Budanov and one of Mr. Kiryeyev's bodyguards.

He would return several days later, typically smoking a cigar during stretches of the long ride to brief Gen. Budanov, according to the member of his security team.

"He received information about everything," the general said. "The world of special services and the world of finance are always connected, like the world of crime, at least in our countries."

In fall 2021, as U.S. military and spy agencies began warning of the Russian threat, Mr. Kiryeyev learned from his sources that Moscow was readying to invade, Gen. Budanov said, and became the first to sound the alarm in Ukraine.

On Jan. 22 last year, the British Foreign Office said Russia was looking at one of Mr. Kiryeyev's former bosses, Andriy Klyuyev, to join a puppet government that Moscow would install in Ukraine. In February, with an invasion appearing imminent, millions of Ukrainians began fleeing west to take refuge abroad.

On Feb. 18, the night before Mr. Kiryeyev had planned to leave Ukraine for an annual ski trip in the French Alps with his wife and a son, he arrived home late. "I won't go," Mr. Kiryeyev told his wife. She tried to change his mind.

"If I left for vacation," she recalled her husband saying, "I wouldn't be able to look myself in the eye." She and her son flew to France without him.

Buy time

Five days later, on the afternoon of Feb. 23, Mr. Kiryeyev handed Gen. Budanov fresh intelligence: Russian President Vladimir Putin had just given orders to invade in the early morning.

Mr. Kiryeyev also knew the main point of attack, Gen. Budanov said.

At 8 a.m. on Feb. 24, low-flying sorties of Russian attack helicopters landed troops at Antonov Airport, several miles north of Kyiv. The Kremlin had planned to commandeer the airport to fly in troops and equipment for an assault on the capital.

Mr. Kiryeyev's tip gave Ukraine a precious few hours to shift troops to counter the Russian assault, Gen. Budanov said. After a fierce battle with the Russians, the airport was damaged beyond use by the invading forces.

With Russia's plans for a quick strike foiled, the two sides arranged for cease-fire talks in Belarus. Because Mr. Kiryeyev knew two members of the Russian delegation, Gen. Budanov asked if he would attend. The general was betting that Mr. Kiryeyev's connections could win a pause in the fighting and give Ukraine more time to mobilize its defenses.

Mr. Kiryeyev knew it would be risky for him to take such a public role in the conflict, and he didn't want to go. For years, he had cultivated relationships on both sides of the border. The war forced him to declare his allegiance.

"Well, damn it," he told the member of his security team. "Since the motherland says so, I'll go."

Mr. Kiryeyev joined Ukraine's defense minister and other officials on the negotiating team ready to depart a Kyiv rail station, according to a former SBU counterintelligence official, who assisted the group.

Photos of Mr. Kiryeyev seated at the negotiating table on Feb. 28 surprised many who knew him, including his wife, who had remained abroad. He hadn't told her.

"After his appearance there, his connection with the special services became obvious to everyone," Gen. Budanov said. "Unfortunately, the situation then was critical, and we had to take risks."

Mr. Kiryeyev returned from Belarus and met with Gen. Budanov for several hours. Mr. Kiryeyev was aware of his jeopardy and left the meeting in a taciturn mood, according to the member of his security team.

Days later, a friend visited Mr. Kiryeyev at his home on Kyiv's northern outskirts. Holding a large-caliber hunting rifle, Mr. Kiryeyev said he had used it to shoot at Russian operatives who had approached his property a few nights earlier, the friend said.

When Russia and Ukraine agreed to a second round of talks, scheduled for March 3, Gen. Budanov again prevailed on Mr. Kiryeyev to attend.

On the night before the negotiations in Belarus, Mr. Kiryeyev received a phone call from the office of Oleksandr Poklad, the counterintelligence chief at the SBU, according to Gen. Budanov. He said that Mr. Poklad, in charge of capturing intelligence and security officers suspected of working for Russia, wanted to meet. Mr. Poklad declined to comment for this article, as did a SBU spokesman, citing a law on state secrets.

Mr. Kiryeyev drove to a Kyiv train station with his personal security crew and military-intelligence agents for his trip to Belarus. He told the bodyguards he might be arrested en route. "Don't intervene," he said, according to the member of his security team.

The group drove to the center of Kyiv and stopped near St. Sophia Cathedral. Several minivans with SBU agents pulled up and ordered the military-intelligence agents and Mr. Kiryeyev's bodyguards to surrender their weapons. Mr. Kiryeyev was directed to a minivan. His security detail lay prone on the street as the van drove away.

About 90 minutes later, the military-intelligence agents were summoned to the spot where they found Mr. Kiryeyev's body.

Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation, which handles such homicides, declined to comment.

Over the next months, the government in Kyiv rooted out Russian accomplices in the security services. "I don't have time to deal with all the traitors," Mr. Zelensky said in March. "But gradually they will all be punished."

In July, Mr. Zelensky fired the SBU chief and removed or prosecuted dozens of the agency's generals for their alleged role in facilitating the Russian invasion. Ukraine opened more than 650 treason cases involving government officials.

	Mr. Kiryeyev was buried with military honors in Kyiv's Baikove Cemetery, amid the graves of Ukrainian heroes. His widow briefly returned to the city in December. She visited his grave three times, the last on her way out of the country.
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HEADLINE	01/18 Stocks fall amid recession fears
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-01-18-2023-11674043955?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	<p>Stocks fell Wednesday after a fresh batch of economic data offered worrying signs of how the economy is weathering the Federal Reserve's tightening campaign.</p> <p>The S&P 500 lost 62.11 points, or 1.6%, to 3928.86 with each of its 11 sectors in the red. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 613.89 points, or 1.8%, to 33296.96. The Nasdaq Composite Index shed 138.10 points, or 1.2%, to 10957.01. All three major indexes gave up gains made in early trading.</p> <p>Wednesday morning data showed retail sales fell 1.1% in December, with higher interest rates and inflation hurting spending on vehicles, gasoline and furniture. Wholesale price inflation fell to its slowest pace since March 2021, brightening the price outlook for consumers and policy makers but casting a cloud over hopes for a "soft landing."</p> <p>"This was good news for the Fed," said Sam Millette, fixed-income strategist for Commonwealth Financial Network. "The slowdown in demand and slowing producer inflation toward year-end is a positive sign that the Fed's more restrictive monetary policy is having a real impact in combating inflation."</p> <p>Derivatives traders are betting that slowing economic data solidifies odds that Fed officials will opt for a relatively small quarter-point rate increase at their coming meeting.</p> <p>Despite positive news on the inflation front and the likelihood of a slower pace of interest-rate increases, investors grew increasingly worried about recession risk as trading continued. It remains to be seen if the Fed's rate increases will throw the economy into a deep downturn, especially as the effects of tighter policy have yet to fully filter into the economy.</p> <p>Investors jumped into Treasury bonds as a result, raising bond prices. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note slid to 3.374% from 3.534% Tuesday.</p> <p>In a WSJ.com event Wednesday morning, St. Louis Fed President James Bullard said he expects the benchmark rate to reach between 5.25% and 5.50% this year, well above market-based expectations of about 4.9%, adding to worries.</p> <p>Stocks have advanced this year in most major markets after a bruising 2022, buoyed by confidence that inflation might move toward central banks' targets without causing a major recession.</p> <p>Some money managers say that optimism might have been misplaced.</p> <p>"Markets aren't remotely priced for the coming recession," said Trevor Greetham, head of multiasset at Royal London Asset Management. "We're in this sort of interregnum between the interest rate-driven bear market of 2022 and the earnings-driven bear market of 2023."</p> <p>A steep slowdown could pinch companies' earnings and weigh on stocks in the coming months even if the Fed pauses interest-rate increases, he added.</p> <p>Still, Mr. Greetham said RLAM's multiasset funds aren't battening down the hatches for a recession just yet. They are tilted toward shares in defensive sectors such as consumer staples, and stocks in emerging</p>

	<p>markets that stand to benefit from China's reopening. He said the firm will start to snap up government bonds and sell stocks when it thinks a downturn is imminent.</p> <p>Global markets were broadly higher. Japanese stocks surged after the Bank of Japan kept its interest-rate targets unchanged. The Nikkei 225 index rose 2.5%.</p> <p>Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.5%. In Europe, gains in basic-resources stocks offset losses for real-estate stocks, leaving the Stoxx Europe 600 up 0.2%.</p> <p>Brent-crude oil fell 1.1% to \$84.98 a barrel. The global benchmark reached as high as \$87.81 a barrel after the International Energy Agency said China's reopening would help lift global oil demand to records, but those gains later turned to losses.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Retail sales fell sharply in December
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-economy-retail-sales-december-2022-11673990047?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>Retail spending fell in December at the sharpest pace of 2022, marking a dismal end to the holiday shopping season as rising interest rates, still-high inflation and concerns about a slowing economy pinched American consumers.</p> <p>Purchases at stores, restaurants and online, declined a seasonally adjusted 1.1% in December from the prior month, the Commerce Department said Wednesday. Sales were also revised lower in November and have fallen three of the past four months. The department seasonally adjusts monthly data to make it comparable over time. On an unadjusted basis, December is typically the peak sales month for the year.</p> <p>A Federal Reserve report Wednesday found economic activity was relatively flat at the start of the year and businesses are pessimistic about growth in the months ahead. A separate Fed report showed U.S. industrial production slumped in December, led by weakness in manufacturing. A Labor Department report showed inflation was cooling.</p> <p>Stocks fell Wednesday after the data releases. The S&P 500 shed 1.6%. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 1.8%, while the Nasdaq Composite Index lost 1.2%. The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note declined 0.16 percentage point to 3.374%.</p> <p>The latest data add to signs that the U.S. economy is slowing as the Fed pushes up interest rates to combat inflation. Hiring and wage growth eased in December, U.S. commerce with the rest of the world declined significantly in November, and existing-home sales have fallen for 10 straight months.</p> <p>S&P Global downgraded its estimate for fourth-quarter economic growth Wednesday by a half percentage point to a 2.3% annual rate. Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal this month expect higher interest rates to tip the U.S. economy into a recession in the coming year.</p> <p>"The lag impact of elevated inflation weighs heavily on U.S. households, it's very clear that the median American consumer is still reeling from the loss of wages in inflation-adjusted terms," said Joseph Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM US LLP. "We're moving towards what I would expect to be a mild recession in 2023," he added.</p> <p>Derivatives traders are betting that the slowing economic data solidifies odds that Fed officials will opt for a relatively small quarter-point rate increase at their Jan. 31-Feb. 1 meeting.</p> <p>On Wednesday, two Fed officials said they would favor quarter-percentage increases, echoing other officials who have said slower rate hikes would be appropriate. That is at odds with the position of Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President James Bullard, who said Wednesday at a Wall Street Journal Live event that he supported a half-point increase at the next meeting.</p>

Inflation, while still historically high, is showing signs of cooling as demand eases. Unlike many government reports, retail sales aren't adjusted for inflation.

Consumer prices [advanced 6.5% from a year earlier in December](#), the sixth straight month of deceleration. The producer-price index, which generally reflects supply conditions in the economy, fell in December from the prior month, and [increased at the slowest annual pace since March 2021](#), the Labor Department said Wednesday.

The National Retail Federation said Wednesday holiday sales were disappointing. The trade group said November and December sales rose 5.3% compared with the same period last year to \$936.3 billion. In November, the NRF said it [expected holiday sales to rise between 6% and 8%](#). The NRF figures aren't adjusted for inflation and exclude fuel, auto and restaurant spending.

Somewhat slower inflation at the end of the year didn't offset weaker demand, said NRF Chief economist Jack Kleinhenz.

Consumers are "hit with higher food prices, they are getting hit with higher service prices and they are having to make choices," he said. Some spending was likely pulled into October as retailers kicked off deals early this year, he added. Retailers [discounted heavily and early](#) to clear excess stock from their shelves and warehouses.

Zach Carney, of Boston, said he has been cutting back on eggs and red meat because the prices are so high. "The [price of eggs](#) really jumps out at you," the 28-year-old publicist said. Instead, he has been stocking up on value packs of chicken and buying more store-brand cereal and olive oil, which cost less than national brands.

The retail sales report showed spending declined in a number of [gift-giving categories](#) in December, including at electronics, clothing and department stores, and with online retailers, a category which includes companies such as [Amazon.com](#) Inc.

Dining out at bars and restaurants dropped 0.9% in December. Sales of furniture and vehicles, which are sensitive to higher borrowing costs, both fell sharply. The only categories to post slight growth in December were grocery, sporting goods and home improvement stores, as [winter storms battered many parts of the U.S.](#)

Some retailers have said the recently completed holiday shopping season turned out to be weaker than expected. [Macy's Inc.](#) [warned of softer sales](#), and [Lululemon Athletica](#) Inc. said its profit margins were squeezed as shoppers bought more items on sale.

Many retailers had benefited from surging sales earlier in the pandemic as shoppers stocked up on everything from toilet paper to home electronics and furniture, [supported by government stimulus dollars](#). Those tailwinds have cooled, leaving retailers and product manufacturers to confront slower spending in some categories and the longer term dynamics of the industry, such as a gradual shift to online spending.

Apparel retailers are especially exposed to the current pullback in discretionary spending, said Kelly Pedersen, the U.S. retail leader at PwC, a consulting firm. "Buying fashion items at department stores is discretionary," said Mr. Pedersen. Many apparel retailers are still working to sell through excess inventory and offering deep discounts amid weak demand, he said.

Department stores, which saw a 6.6% sales drop in December, [struggled to boost sales](#) before the pandemic quickly shifted buying habits. In 2020, a string of department stores filed for bankruptcy, including Lord & Taylor, J.C. Penney Co., Neiman Marcus Group Ltd. and Stage Stores Inc.

	<p>Party City Holdco Inc. filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy this week while noting inflationary pressures have hampered customers' willingness to spend. Bed Bath & Beyond Inc. said this month it plans more layoffs and cost cuts amid falling sales.</p> <p>The retail sales report offers a partial picture of consumer demand because it doesn't include spending on many services such as travel, housing and utilities. The Commerce Department will release December household spending figures covering goods and services later this month.</p> <p>Corporate reports out in February will add to that picture. Walmart Inc., Target Corp. and other large retailers—which sell a variety of goods such as food, clothes and décor—report quarterly earnings next month, which will include December sales.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 No German tanks Ukraine unless US sends
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/berlin-wont-allow-exports-of-german-tanks-to-ukraine-unless-u-s-sends-own-tanks-officials-say-11674069352?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>BERLIN—Germany won't allow allies to ship German-made tanks to Ukraine to help its defense against Russia nor send its own systems unless the U.S. agrees to send American-made battle tanks, senior German officials said on Wednesday.</p> <p>North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies have over 2,000 German-made Leopard tanks, considered to be among the most sophisticated in the world, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.</p> <p>Several European governments have said they are ready to send German-made tanks to Ukraine, including Poland, Finland and Denmark, if they get approval from Berlin, though none has made a formal request. Britain has said it would send 14 of its Challenger 2 main battle tanks, an older equivalent to the Leopard.</p> <p>“One can't differentiate between direct exports (of German-made tanks) and exports by third countries,” a senior German official said Wednesday.</p> <p>But the U.S. is “not there yet” when it comes to giving Abrams tanks to Ukraine, Colin Kahl, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, the No. 3 at the Pentagon, told reporters on Wednesday.</p> <p>“The Abrams tank is very complicated, It's expensive. It's hard to train on. It has a jet engine...It is not the easiest system to maintain,” Dr. Kahl said. While he didn't directly address Germany's call for the U.S. to provide tanks, he said the Pentagon doesn't want to give Ukrainians equipment “they can't repair, they can't sustain and they over the long term can't afford.”</p> <p>“This isn't about the news cycle or what's symbolically valuable. It's what will actually help Ukraine,” Dr. Kahl said.</p> <p>But the U.S. remains hopeful it can persuade Germany to greenlight the tanks. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Berlin Wednesday to meet with his counterpart in Germany, Boris Pistorius, who was named to the post on Tuesday following the resignation of the previous defense minister, Christine Lambrecht.</p> <p>U.S. officials believe the Leopard tanks can help Ukraine confront the moment it is facing now—a Russian offensive that is anticipated to begin soon.</p> <p>“That's why we are looking at modern, mechanized armored capabilities, and that's why the focus on tanks, and Germany is the key to that capability because the most immediate need, the most accessible, useful capability are the Leopards,” said a senior U.S. defense official.</p>

“We are very optimistic that we will make progress on this requirement by the end of the week,” the official said. It was unclear if the U.S. official was aware of the German position regarding American tanks.

The export of significant numbers of modern, Western-made tanks—something the U.S. and Ukraine’s European allies have long resisted—would mark a notable escalation in Western support for Kyiv. Berlin has long been concerned that such a step could drag the country into [a direct confrontation with Russia](#).

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Wednesday that Germany was “strategically interlocked” with friends and partners when it came to making decisions on how to support Ukraine, including with tanks.

By deferring to Washington, Mr. Scholz is now adding pressure on President Biden to authorize the export of Abrams tanks to Kyiv, the closest U.S. equivalent to the Leopard.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday the war has entered a pivotal phase and NATO allies need to provide more heavy weaponry, particularly tanks, to Ukraine.

Mr. Stoltenberg said in an interview at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that he is looking for “more announcements of modern and heavier weapons,” following moves by the U.K., France and Canada in recent days to provide additional armored vehicles. But for Ukraine to prevail, Kyiv will require more than what has already been committed, he added.

“It means more armored vehicles,” he said. “It means battle tanks as we’ve seen U.K. and France have already announced.” It also means more advanced air-defense systems, he said.

France said recently it would ship AMX-10 wheeled armored vehicles to Ukraine. The vehicle resembles a small tank with wheels and is referred to as a “tank killer” because it fires shells that can pierce tanks’ armor and destroy them.

Key supporters of Ukraine from 50 nations, known as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, [plan to meet](#) at the U.S.’s Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday to agree on a substantial new package of military aid to Kyiv.

Diplomats from several NATO countries said that the issue of sending Leopards—including Germany’s approval for third-country exports to Ukraine—would be one of the key topics at the meeting.

Mr. Scholz’s government hasn’t received any such requests, several officials said, but when it does, it said it would respond swiftly. The interagency process of approval could take anything from a few days to a few weeks, officials said.

Germany, like many arms-making countries, requires buyers to seek its governmental approval before exporting its military equipment to a third nation.

Some European diplomats had hoped that Germany would signal at the Friday meeting that it would permit allies to send German-made Leopard tanks to Ukraine. However a senior European official said that Germany was unlikely to make a decision on Friday and that it would likely take longer.

There are two main types of German main battle tanks: Leopard 1, designed in the 1960s, and the much-improved model Leopard 2. Germany itself has only about 15 Leopard 2 tanks it could ship to Ukraine on short notice, officials said.

Mr. Scholz’s government is divided on the issue: His coalition partners, the Green Party and the Free Democrats favor sending tanks to Ukraine, while many in the chancellor’s left-leaning Social Democrats—including himself—have long been reluctant, especially as long as the U.S. refuses to send its own Abrams tanks.

	<p>In April, Mr. Scholz suggested sending any Western tanks to Ukraine would increase the risk of a nuclear war between NATO and Russia.</p> <p>His concerns have since subsided, two aides said, also because a broad, global group of countries including allies to President Vladimir Putin such as Xi Jinping of China, condemned the threats of using nuclear weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>Yet Mr. Scholz remains cautious. Asked on Wednesday why he was hesitating to send Leopard tanks to Kyiv, Mr. Scholz told the World Economic Forum that he was concerned about the Ukraine conflict becoming a global conflagration.</p> <p>“The Ukrainians can rely on our support in their courageous fight but it is also clear that we want to avoid this becoming a war between Russia and NATO,” Mr. Scholz said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 AAA: rising oil cost drives higher gas price
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/money/gas-prices-rise-tandem-oil-demand-drops-aaa
GIST	<p>Lousy winter weather drove the demand for gas down, but the rising cost of oil is driving the increase in prices at the pump, according to the latest report from AAA.</p> <p>The national average cost for a gallon of gas rose to \$3.32, four cents more than last week and 17 cents more than a month ago. But demand for gas has eroded, evidenced by the increase in gasoline supply to 226.8 million barrels of crude oil (bbl) from 222.7 million bbl.</p> <p>The lackluster demand for gas and the increase in supply are limiting pump price increases, AAA said.</p> <p>"Gasoline demand is usually lackluster this time of year, and it likely won't start to tick up until spring break draws near," Andrew Gross, a AAA spokesperson, said. "So the primary factor in this latest increase is the higher cost of oil, which accounts for more than half of what you pay at the pump."</p> <p>Oil prices have risen as a result of growing demand. One catalyst has been the re-opening of China as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, according to GasBuddy's head of petroleum analysis Patrick De Haan.</p> <p>The surge in demand for oil is expected "to rebound more than expected in the months ahead," according to an Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) forecast, De Haan said.</p> <p>"Oil prices have seen a bit of a rally, finishing last week at nearly \$80 per barrel again as Chinese demand starts to jump as expected, but with Covid cases and deaths now also surging in China, the jump in demand could be short-lived," De Haan said in a statement. "Gas prices may nudge up slightly in the week ahead in some areas, while others could hold flat."</p> <p>"The window on price drops, however, appears to be coming up on the horizon as we get closer to what's likely to be a significant refinery maintenance period ahead of summer," De Haan continued.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Canada: 'no amount' of alcohol is healthy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/world/americas/canada-alcohol-health-guidelines.html
GIST	<p>Canadian health officials have overhauled their guidelines for alcohol consumption, warning that no amount is healthy and recommending that people reduce drinking as much as possible.</p> <p>The new guidelines, issued Tuesday, represent a major shift from the previous ones introduced in 2011, which recommended that women consume no more than 10 drinks per week and that men limit themselves to 15.</p>

The experts who developed the guidelines said the new approach builds on growing evidence, after decades of sometimes conflicting research, that [even small amounts of alcohol can have serious health consequences](#).

Instead of recommending that people limit themselves to a specific number of drinks per week, the guidelines outline a “continuum of risk” associated with drinking even a few glasses of wine or beer over a seven-day period.

The risk is “low” for people who consume two standard drinks or fewer per week; “moderate” for those who consume between three and six standard drinks per week; and “increasingly high” for those who consume seven or more standard drinks per week, according to the guidelines, which were [issued in a report](#) by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

The report defines a standard drink as a 12-ounce bottle of beer that is 5 percent alcohol, a five-ounce glass of wine that is 12 percent alcohol or a 1.5-ounce shot glass of a spirit that is 40 percent alcohol.

“Research shows that no amount or kind of alcohol is good for your health,” the report states. “It doesn’t matter what kind of alcohol it is — wine, beer, cider or spirits. Drinking alcohol, even a small amount, is damaging to everyone, regardless of age, sex, gender, ethnicity, tolerance for alcohol or lifestyle. That’s why if you drink, it’s better to drink less.”

[Recent research](#) has found that even low levels of drinking slightly increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, and the risk goes up significantly for people who drink excessively.

Research published in November revealed that between 2015 and 2019, excessive alcohol use resulted in roughly [140,000 deaths per year](#) in the United States. About 40 percent of those deaths had acute causes, like car crashes. But a majority were caused by chronic conditions attributed to alcohol, such as liver disease, cancer and heart disease.

Dr. Catherine Paradis, interim associate director of research at the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, said that consumption of even two drinks per week has been associated with an elevated risk of seven types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer, as well as cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Paradis, who was a co-chairwoman of the panel that developed the new guidelines, noted that [the World Health Organization had recently declared](#) that the harms associated with drinking alcohol had been “systematically evaluated over the years and are well documented” and that “when it comes to alcohol consumption, there is no safe amount that does not affect health.”

The good news, the report said, is that any reduction in alcohol consumption is beneficial. This is true even for those who do not cut their drinking to low or moderate levels. In fact, those consuming high levels of alcohol have much to gain by reducing their consumption by as much as possible, the report states.

“We have this line: Drink less, live more,” said Dr. Alexander Cuddeback, chief executive of the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. “The idea is that any reduction of alcohol will significantly reduce your risk.”

The new guidelines depart from the specific drink limits called for in other Western countries.

[Australia](#), for example, recommends no more than 10 drinks a week and no more than four drinks on any one day. [Britain](#) recommends drinking no more than six medium glasses of wine or six pints of beer per week. The [guidelines in the United States](#) call for two drinks or fewer a day for men and one drink or fewer per day for women.

Canadian health officials said they hoped their less prescriptive approach would encourage consumers to make healthier choices.

“The guidance is really a fundamentally different way of looking at alcohol and saying we need to be much more open and transparent about what are the risks associated with it and what the science has shown us,” Dr. Caudarella said. “It’s really putting it out there in a way that lets people assess their own risk target and work toward it.”

To encourage consumers to cut down on their drinking, the report recommended that all alcoholic beverages sold in Canada come with warning labels, similar to those on cigarettes. Evidence shows that adding health warnings to alcohol labels can increase public awareness of the link between alcohol consumption and cancer, the report states.

Beer Canada, a national trade group that represents more than 50 Canadian brewing companies, said that it continued to support the 2011 guidelines and that the process of updating those guidelines “lacked full transparency and, to date, has not included the essential rigor of an expert technical peer review.”

“Beer Canada and Canadian brewers have a long history promoting moderation and responsible consumption,” the group said in a statement. “Beer Canada believes the decision whether to drink, and if so how much, is a personal one. Responsible, moderate consumption can be part of a balanced lifestyle for most adults of legal drinking age.”

Dan Paszkowski, president and chief executive of Wine Growers Canada, which represents the country’s wineries, said the group had introduced a campaign, “[The Right Amount](#),” in 2021 to promote “responsible consumption of wine.”

“It’s essential for Canadians to have confidence in public health institutions and the messaging must be informative, not persuasive, and based on sound science,” Mr. Paszkowski wrote in [an opinion piece](#) published this week in The Hill Times, a news outlet focused on Canadian politics and government.

“From some to none, the right amount is different for every person.”

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HEADLINE	01/18 Russian officials appeal for Navalny care
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-russia-prison.html
GIST	<p>The Russian opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny, whose health has deteriorated in prison, has gotten another unusual public show of support, as dozens of current and former municipal deputies and local lawmakers signed an open letter on Wednesday demanding that he receive more humane treatment and access to proper medical care.</p> <p>Their open letter to President Vladimir V. Putin is the latest in a series of public appeals from members of Russian civil society who have braved his crackdown on dissent since the invasion of Ukraine. Last week, hundreds of Russian doctors signed a petition imploring Mr. Putin to “stop abusing” Mr. Navalny. And dozens of Russian lawyers signed a similar letter this week, the independent news outlet Meduza reported.</p> <p>Mr. Navalny’s health has deteriorated in the harsh conditions of his imprisonment. In late December, posting on Twitter, Mr. Navalny said he believed that Russian officials were intentionally endangering his health to bend him to their will. His wife has urged prison officials to provide him with medicine.</p> <p>Wednesday’s letter was signed by Russian deputies representing cities and regions across the country who said that despite the federal government’s aggressive clampdown on free speech, support and concern for Mr. Navalny remained.</p> <p>“It is very clear to everyone who follows Aleksei’s life — the purpose of his continuous incarceration in a punishment cell is to create unbearable conditions for him in the penal colony and to cause harm to his physical and mental health, as well as to create a threat to his life,” the letter said. It added that the</p>

	<p>deputies had constituents who had supported Mr. Navalny’s political activities and his fight against corruption for years.</p> <p>The letter, which contained the signatories’ full names and titles, was addressed to Mr. Putin as well as Russia’s prosecutor general and the Human Rights Council of the Russian Federation. It demanded, among other things, that Mr. Navalny be removed from punishment cells and given timely medical care or access to civilian hospitals if needed.</p> <p>Such public dissent has become particularly rare in Russia since Mr. Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine and then effectively criminalized any public opposition to it. The risks are serious: One Russian lawmaker was sentenced to seven years in prison this summer for denouncing the war.</p> <p>The Russian officials who signed the open letter acknowledged the grave risk they were taking, but argued that silence over Mr. Navalny’s treatment was not an option.</p> <p>“Even expressing one’s opinion on the internet is fraught with high risks of prosecution, administrative and criminal. Therefore, it looks to you like everything is in order — no one protests, everyone is silent,” they said. “We are not silent.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 L.A. Black residents most at-risk for floods
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/us/los-angeles-flood-risk-black-residents.html
GIST	<p>LONG BEACH, Calif.— When it rains in Queen Hollins’s West Long Beach neighborhood, bordering a freeway with the Los Angeles River just beyond, the storm drains overflow, filling the sides of each street with several inches of water.</p> <p>Then the sun comes out, the water recedes, and the neighbors go back to worrying about all of the obvious environmental hazards of living in a Southern California neighborhood bordered by three freeways and the Port of Long Beach: heat, drought, air quality and aging infrastructure.</p> <p>Yet another, invisible hazard may lurk in Ms. Hollins’s neighborhood as well: the threat of severe flooding.</p> <p>More than 400,000 people live in parts of Los Angeles County that could be inundated with a foot or more of floodwater in a 100-year-flood event, the kind that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any year, according to a recent study by researchers at University of California, Irvine. And a disproportionate share of the most vulnerable residents are Black.</p> <p>The analysis found that Black residents of the county were 79 percent more likely than white residents to be living at risk of deep flooding of at least three feet, or about waist high. For Latinos, the figure was 17 percent, and for Asians, 11 percent.</p> <p>The results of the study, published late last year, raised the stakes for what it means to live in a region buffeted by increasingly severe weather and the challenge of equitably protecting people and property. It also presents challenges for a region more accustomed to responding to the effects of severe rain and flash floods in canyons, hills and coastal beach towns, and not so much in the concrete sprawl and congested urban neighborhoods bisected by the Los Angeles River, which is usually a dry concrete channel baking in the Southern California sun.</p> <p>And while the threats posed by California’s multiyear drought are far more present than those of a once-a-century flood, the destructive rainstorms that have churned through California over the last three weeks have brought the issue of flooding into dramatic focus. The series of storms, known as atmospheric rivers, swelled many rivers and creeks in the state, flooded fields and highways, caused mudslides, prompted evacuation orders for tens of thousands of people and, as of Tuesday, had caused at least 20 deaths.</p>

“People aren’t thinking about flooding, because it barely rains here in Los Angeles,” Ms. Hollins said, even though, if you look, the threat of flooding was “already a reality.”

Published in the journal [Nature Sustainability](#), the study by the U.C. Irvine researchers showed that a catastrophic flood event would inundate a number of pockets of Los Angeles County. Among the areas most at risk are a dense tangle of city neighborhoods intertwined with industrial zones, stretching south of downtown Los Angeles. Many of the neighborhoods are clustered around the Los Angeles River, which was excavated and paved decades ago to help prevent flooding.

The study’s high-resolution models showed that between 197,000 and 874,000 people, and between \$36 billion and \$108 billion in property, lay within the 100-year flood zone and could be exposed to at least a foot of water in such a flood. The impact would be comparable to those of major hurricanes like Katrina, Sandy or Harvey.

In the worst-case scenarios for Los Angeles County, too much water might swamp an aging drainage system and the network of waterways — including portions of the Los Angeles River, Dominguez Channel, Compton Creek and San Gabriel River — that run across the county.

The projected risks of deep flooding “are primarily linked to overtopping of flood channels mostly constructed in the decades following World War II and are now undersized or inadequately maintained,” the study says. The channels’ capacity has been reduced over time by sediment and vegetation, while the volume of runoff they must handle has grown with the “expansion of impervious surfaces” caused by development.

The study cited several cities in particular that demonstrate the outsized impact that floods would have on Black communities. In Long Beach, for example, the exposed population of 88,000 to 262,000 residents is disproportionately non-Hispanic Black, and the situation is similar in the smaller cities of Paramount, Carson and South Gate, some of which have low-lying neighborhoods and businesses in what were once marshlands.

Brett F. Sanders, lead author of the report and a professor of civil and environmental engineering at U.C. Irvine, noted that Black residents make up only around nine percent of the total population of Los Angeles County, “yet that smaller fraction disproportionately settled in a part of the county that would be highly exposed to river flood risk.”

Whose homes would be flooded is only part of the problem. Inequities, the study noted, “are critically important because recovery from floods is often prolonged and incomplete among socially marginalized, low-wealth and vulnerable communities.”

Dr. Sanders said he hoped local officials would use the study when making plans for flood protection. Some ideas to better prepare for major flooding include revisiting building codes, considering elevating the foundations of houses and creating more green space to absorb water.

Focus groups, which included Los Angeles County public works representatives, were used to help develop the study. Another of the study’s authors, Nicola Ulibarri, an associate professor of urban planning and public policy at Irvine, noted that members of the focus groups said the study’s maps could be used on a micro level for practical action like building bus stops in places residents could reach without walking through flooded streets.

Dr. Sanders said the county and the researchers are in early discussions about how to use the data presented in the study.

Last year, Los Angeles County began reviewing its own policies to get a fuller picture of inequities in infrastructure investments. The examination is independent of the university study.

“We took a historical look at some of our investments in the different sectors, including flood control and water conservation,” said Mark Pestrella, executive director of Los Angeles County Public Works. “Infrastructure can be very reflective of where there was racism and a lack of equity in decision making through the years. So we need to ask why some neighborhoods are fully drained and others aren’t; why some neighborhoods have trees and some don’t.”

Early results from the county examination, he said, showed a nexus between race and ethnicity, and infrastructure investment or the lack of it. “It’s an unfortunate truth,” he said.

Mr. Pestrella said county workers had gone door to door in neighborhoods to raise awareness of the risks of flooding, educate residents about flood insurance and offer tips for retrofitting homes. Los Angeles city officials have said the city had held public workshops on flood risks and was working to update its flood hazard maps.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn, whose district includes some of the impacted areas in the study, said she has asked the Department of Public Works to assess storm water infrastructure and report back to the board with a plan for any necessary changes.

“The report out of U.C. Irvine is alarming,” Ms. Hahn said. “Now the county needs to take a hard look at our infrastructure and see what we can do to protect these communities if and when the storm we are all worried about comes.”

The recent rainstorms have had the most severe impact in the northern and central parts of the state, but they are also awakening more Southern Californians to the risks of flooding in their neighborhoods.

Two years ago, when Jai Phillips, a social worker, purchased his house in Longwood, a narrow sliver of a neighborhood sandwiched between the Los Angeles River and Compton Creek, he had no idea that the area was particularly susceptible to flooding, as the U.C. Irvine study found.

“Every time it rains, there’s a little pool,” said Mr. Phillips, 42. “The size of the pool just depends on how big or how much rain it gets.” It’s so well known an issue, he added, that city workers have to be sent out to spray the pools for mosquitoes.

In the past several weeks, the hard rainfall has caught his attention.

“I keep looking out the front door and I’m like, oh, water is getting higher and higher,” he said. “This is the highest I’ve seen it here, because it’s the most rain we’ve had since I’ve been here, but looking out my window and looking at my neighbor directly across the street, their driveway is starting to get flooded.”

He loves his neighborhood, with its midcentury single-family houses and its magnolia trees. Besides, the “likelihood of a flood is slim, because we’re usually in a drought in California,” he said. “And the L.A. River helps to channel a lot of the water away. And then, again, it’s about, you know, what I could afford. I guess it was like a calculated risk.”

Cathy Castro, a 78-year-old retired language teacher, lives in the Mertz Del Amo Estates mobile home park, near the western bank of Compton Creek. During the rainstorms that blanketed California this month, the streets of her low-lying community “looked like rivers,” she said.

Even so, she said, most of her neighbors in the 500-unit park were more concerned about leaking roofs than the threat of flooding. As for Ms. Castro herself, she was keeping a close eye on the puddles growing ever deeper in the brick planters outside her home. If they overflowed, the water could seep down and damage her foundation.

In West Long Beach, Ms. Hollins has lived and worked for the past 30 years out of her one-story ranch house, set on a property lush with trees, native plants and shrubbery.

	<p>Despite the proximity of the river and how quickly a rainstorm can overwhelm the neighborhood's storm drains, Ms. Hollins and her partner, Yardenna Aaron, did not realize the extent of the flood risk in the area. But they believe extreme weather is only going to worsen.</p> <p>Ms. Aaron and Ms. Hollins picked up about eight sandbags from the Long Beach Fire Department last week and planned to return for more, Ms. Aaron said. Over the long, rainy holiday weekend, they arranged the sandbags around their garage and supply shed.</p> <p>This year, they have "needed more tarps, more sandbags, and we had a handyman come out to fortify the shed ahead of time," she said. "We're learning."</p> <p>On Monday, buckets and jugs they had laid out on their porch to catch rainfall had filled up overnight. But the streets were clear of water, and the sun was out and shining.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 NYC mayor: spread burden border migrants
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/18/new-york-mayor-says-other-jurisdictions-should-bea/
GIST	<p>New York Mayor Eric Adams complained Wednesday that big cities are bearing too much of the burden of welcoming the surge of illegal immigrants from the southern border, and he called for the feds to create a new national system to "fairly distribute" the newcomers.</p> <p>Mr. Adams also said the illegal immigrants should get expedited consideration for work permits so they can take jobs here.</p> <p>Speaking to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Mr. Adams said it's unfair that cities like his are struggling to deal with what he called a global problem that needs national solutions.</p> <p>And he said Republicans are blocking those solutions.</p> <p>"Every attempt to deal with immigration on a national level through legislation has been sabotaged, mostly by right-wing opposition, and cities are bearing the brunt of this failure," he said.</p> <p>His six-point plan offered no solutions for curtailing the surge of people headed to the U.S., instead focusing on how to welcome them with more resources and to spread them out so cities like his don't have to deal with as much of it.</p> <p>Mr. Adams called the illegal immigrants "asylum seekers," though that is true for only a portion of the population. And nearly all of them entered the country illegally, jumping the border where they were caught then released by Customs and Border Protection.</p> <p>Mr. Adams got roped into the issue when Texas began busing migrants to his city. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said he was trying to alleviate the burden of his state dealing with the majority of catch-and-release cases.</p> <p>The New York leader has pleaded for more federal assistance, and Congress did allocate more money in December's spending bill to help localities welcome the illegal immigrants.</p> <p>Republicans argue the solution lies not in faster processing and more resources for those who arrive but rather in a policy to prevent the arrivals in the first place.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Microsoft lays off 10,000: 5% of workforce
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/microsoft-cuts-10000-jobs-about-5-of-global-workforce/
GIST	Microsoft is cutting 10,000 workers, almost 5% of its workforce, in response to what it described as "macroeconomic conditions and changing customer priorities."

The company said in a regulatory filing Wednesday that had just notified employees of the layoffs, some of which will begin immediately.

The company said it will also be making changes to its hardware portfolio and consolidating its leased office locations.

The layoffs represent “less than 5 percent of our total employee base, with some notifications happening today,” CEO Satya Nadella said in an email to employees.

“While we are eliminating roles in some areas, we will continue to hire in key strategic areas,” Nadella said. He emphasized the importance of building a “new computer platform” using advances in artificial intelligence.

He said customers that were accelerating their spending on digital technology during the pandemic are now trying to “optimize their digital spend to do more with less.”

“We’re also seeing organizations in every industry and geography exercise caution as some parts of the world are in a recession and other parts are anticipating one,” Nadella wrote.

Other tech companies have also been trimming jobs amid concerns about an economic slowdown.

Amazon and business software maker Salesforce earlier this month announced major job cuts as they prune payrolls that rapidly expanded during the pandemic lockdown.

Amazon said that it will be cutting about 18,000 positions. It’s the largest set of layoffs in the Seattle company’s history, although just a fraction of its 1.5 million global workforce.

Facebook parent Meta is laying off 11,000 people, about 13% of its workforce. And Elon Musk, the new Twitter CEO, has slashed the company’s workforce.

Nadella made no direct mention of the layoffs on Wednesday when he put in an appearance at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting happening this week in Davos, Switzerland.

When asked by the forum’s founder Klaus Schwab on what tech layoffs meant for the industry’s business model, Nadella said companies that boomed during the COVID-19 pandemic are now seeing “normalization” of that demand.

“Quite frankly, we in the tech industry will also have to get efficient, right?” Nadella said. “It’s not about everyone else doing more with less. We will have to do more with less. So we will have to show our own productivity gains with our own sort of technology.”

Schwab also asked Nadella about employee loyalty to Microsoft. Nadella said workers “should think of Microsoft as a platform to be able to connect with our mission to achieve what’s core to them. I think that’s the social equation.”

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HEADLINE	01/18 Portland settles federal lawsuit over protest
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-shot-with-less-lethal-munitions-at-portland-riot-will-get-80k/
GIST	Portland and Multnomah County are paying a combined \$80,000 to settle a federal lawsuit filed by a man shot with less-lethal munitions by a Portland police officer and a county sheriff’s sergeant during a declared riot downtown on July 4, 2020. The city will pay \$75,000 and the county \$5,000 to Erik Hoofnagle, 35, of Portland.

Senior Deputy City Attorney Caroline Turco said the case was resolved with the help of mediation before a retired judge. They reached a “mutually agreeable settlement” to cover Hoofnagle’s injuries and attorney fees, Turco told City Council members Wednesday.

Hoofnagle had been walking away from police with a crowd that was ordered to move northbound on Southwest Fourth Avenue when police fired a smoke grenade at the group. Hoofnagle kicked the smoke canister diagonally across the street to get it out of the way of protesters near the Fourth Avenue intersection with Southwest Washington Street, according to his lawyers.

He was then shot with a volley of munitions, according to video played for the council and court reports. Hoofnagle suffered 14 wounds, including a broken right kneecap, according to his lawyers.

Hoofnagle was arrested, accused of rioting and interfering with police, but the charges were dismissed in early August at the request of a deputy district attorney.

Hoofnagle didn’t commit any crimes, nor did he actively resist any lawful orders, said J. Ashlee Albies, one of his lawyers.

The council approved the settlement in a 4-0 vote. The mayor was out of town.

Portland Officer Brent Taylor shot Hoofnagle at least nine times with pink paint projectiles fired from an FN303 launcher as Hoofnagle was stepping backward away from the police line, Albies said. He also was shot in the back after he had fallen on the ground, she said.

Multnomah County Sgt. Kyle Smith, part of the sheriff’s Rapid Response Team, fired a single 40-mm blue-tipped projectile from a shotgun in response to Hoofnagle’s kicking of the smoke canister back at police, according to Christopher Gilmore, a senior assistant county attorney.

The suit alleged that Taylor filed a false report, claiming he had shot Hoofnagle “in the act of picking up and throwing” a smoking canister at police. But the video revealed Hoofnagle didn’t pick up, “much less throw” any canister, his lawyers wrote in court papers.

Hoofnagle was shot four days after a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order against police in a separate suit. U.S. District Judge Marco A. Hernandez barred police from firing less-lethal FN303 and 40-mm launchers and using pepper spray on people engaged in passive resistance.

Taylor and police argued that Hoofnagle’s actions were “perceived” by multiple officers as “active aggression,” saying he kicked the canister toward officers during a riot, according to Aaron P. Hisel, Taylor’s lawyer.

City lawyers also argued there was no evidence Hoofnagle’s kneecap was broken or shattered. They said Hoofnagle may have been struck twice by Taylor’s projectiles and not in the knee. He didn’t disperse with the crowd but “turned around and kicked the canister,” Turco wrote in a court filing.

Gilmore, the county’s lawyer, argued in court papers that the smoke canister “placed the officers at direct risk of harm from impact, prevented officers from identifying incoming projectiles from the crowd, and interfered with a lawful police action that was intended to disperse an ongoing riot.”

Albies countered: “Despite the government’s proffered interest in clearing the downtown streets, they are not justified in using force against a person who is not an active threat at the time the force was used.” Hoofnagle was protecting the public by kicking the smoke canister away from himself and other protesters who were retreating from police, she said.

	<p>Hoofnagle moved to Portland in 2011 from Bellingham, Washington. He graduated from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2015. He began participating in local Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man killed by Minneapolis police on May 25, 2020.</p> <p>On the day he was shot, Hoofnagle was wearing shin guards and a baseball helmet and holding a shield fashioned out of cardboard and duct tape to protect himself out of fear of harm from police, his lawyer wrote in court documents.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Error: Pierce Co. shared sensitive voter info
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271331562.html
GIST	<p>Pierce County inadvertently shared the last four Social Security digits for more than 463,000 registered voters in response to a public records request, spokeswoman Libby Catalinich said Wednesday.</p> <p>The sensitive information was sent by mistake last month to one person who sought public voter registration records from the county, Catalinich told The News Tribune.</p> <p>“It’s a very regrettable situation,” she said.</p> <p>The hundreds of thousands of people who were affected should start to receive notification letters this week, as early as Wednesday, according to Catalinich. She said that the person who made the request and subsequently received the sensitive electronic data on Dec. 20 had no intention of using the information and deleted it.</p> <p>“This wasn’t a breach. It wasn’t someone hacking into a system,” Catalinich said. “It was literally the fulfillment of a very routine public records request, and someone made a simple mistake.”</p> <p>An employee fulfilling the request accidentally provided a spreadsheet that included the last four digits of the voters’ Social Security numbers, according to a copy of the letter being sent to affected voters. The county collects that data, or a driver’s license number, when people sign up to vote.</p> <p>The employee in the county Auditor’s Office nearly immediately realized their mistake in December, which is how it came to the county’s attention, Catalinich said. After the employee was unable to undo sending the data, they notified a supervisor.</p> <p>“The supervisor contacted the requester, an individual acting in good faith, and asked the requester to delete the file and the transmission email,” Catalinich wrote in response to follow-up questions from The News Tribune.</p> <p>“The requester was cooperative, stated this was complete and these items were deleted from the trash folder.” The letter to affected voters — dated Tuesday and sent by public records officer Whitney Stevens in the Auditor’s Office — said that those actions occurred within two hours of the data’s initial release.</p> <p>“We have confirmed that there was no widespread dissemination of information and no retention or copying of the information by the requester,” Stevens wrote.</p> <p>Asked why the county waited nearly a month before notifying affected individuals, Catalinich said that officials wanted to understand the full scope of the issue, including whom they needed to contact, and confirm that the information was destroyed before sending out letters.</p> <p>Catalinich said by phone that the employee fulfilling the request did not properly check or uncheck a field in the county’s voter database to exclude the last four social security numbers associated with voters.</p> <p>In a subsequent email, Catalinich assured that the county had put in safeguards to ensure that a similar error would not occur in the future.</p>

“This human error was the result of two separate functions of elections administration – maintenance of our voter registration files and fulfilling data requests – being completed by one individual,” she wrote.

“Several processes have been reviewed and altered to decrease the likelihood of this occurring, and new procedures have been put in place requiring a second individual to review the data requests before they are released.”

Personally identifiable information, such as partial Social Security numbers, is exempt from disclosure under federal and state laws.

In the letter to affected residents, Stevens included steps they could take against “potential misuse of your personal information,” including contacts for the Federal Trade Commission to report suspicious activity and methods to obtain a free credit report.

“This kind of mistake has never happened before, and we have enhanced our protocols to prevent this kind of mistake from occurring again,” the letter read.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Amazon lays off 2,300 in Seattle, Bellevue
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon-handing-out-pink-slips-as-next-round-of-layoffs-kicks-off/
GIST	<p>Amazon has laid off 2,300 workers in Seattle and Bellevue, according to information released Wednesday by Washington state’s unemployment office.</p> <p>The layoffs will begin March 19, following a 60-day transitional period where Amazon will continue to pay affected employees but won’t expect them to work.</p> <p>The most recent round of layoffs, announced Wednesday and part of the company’s efforts to slim down, affected its human resources and stores divisions. Amazon’s Worldwide Stores business, led by Doug Herrington, is the retail arm of the tech and e-commerce giant. It includes Amazon’s online and physical stores, marketplace for third-party sellers, and Amazon’s Prime subscription service.</p> <p>Of the 2,300 workers cut from Amazon’s Puget Sound-region headquarters, 1,852 are in Seattle and 448 are in Bellevue. Details on the scope of Amazon’s layoffs came as a Washington State Employment Security Department notice Wednesday revealed that at least 878 of the 10,000 workers Microsoft plans to cut are based in the Seattle area.</p> <p>Seattle is Amazon’s biggest campus, with 55,000 employees based in its South Lake Union offices. The company had been on a hiring spree outside the city to expand its Puget Sound headquarters, bringing its total head count in Bellevue to 10,000 last summer.</p> <p>All employees in the U.S. and Canada affected by this most recent wave of job cuts will likely be notified Wednesday, according to messages shared with The Seattle Times by Amazon. A spokesperson for the company declined to disclose how many workers were laid off companywide.</p> <p>After weeks of hinting at a slowdown — including a corporate hiring freeze and kicking off an annual cost-cutting review — Amazon began layoffs in November. The first wave largely affected employees in the company’s Devices organization, which includes Amazon’s voice assistant, Alexa, as well as Kindle, smart home products, Echo speakers, health device Halo and home robot Astro.</p> <p>Amazon also offered resignation packages to some workers in its human resources department. The company internally calls that team People Experience and Technology, or PXT.</p> <p>After telling employees in November the job cuts would continue into the new year, CEO Andy Jassy said earlier this month the layoffs would likely total 18,000. That came as a shock to some: When news of the layoffs first broke, it was expected the job cuts would affect about 10,000 people.</p>

On Wednesday, the heads of Amazon's HR and stores division confirmed the cuts had come.

"While it is painful to say goodbye to many of our talented colleagues, it is an important part of a wider effort to lower our cost to serve so we can continue investing in the wide selection, low prices and fast shipping that our customers love," said Herrington, who was named CEO of Worldwide Amazon Stores business in June.

Earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, Herrington continued, Amazon's first priority was scaling up, to meet the needs of customers spending more time at home. "The exit out of COVID" over the past year has been challenging for Amazon, with labor shortages, supply chain difficulties, inflation and "productivity overhang" after the company expanded rapidly, he said.

The layoffs are one of several steps Amazon has planned to decrease its costs, Herrington said. It now plans to increase local stock of some of its most popular items and increase the ways customers can buy everyday essentials.

"Every team has a role to play in finding ways to reduce costs while improving selection, pricing and delivery speeds," Herrington wrote. "I am confident that Amazonians will bring their ownership, innovation and bias for action to this challenge, unlocking even more value for customers."

Beth Galetti, head of Amazon's HR department, told employees that after initial steps, like a hiring freeze and offering voluntary release programs to some workers, "further action" was needed.

"The nature of our work in PXT is such that we often need to support employees and customers while being affected by the very same issues affecting those who need our support," Galetti wrote. "It is part of what makes our work meaningful, but there are moments when it is also personally challenging."

Amazon said laid-off workers will receive severance, a separation payment, transitional benefits and external job placement support.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Another store leaving downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/whats-the-impact-of-another-major-retailer-leaving-downtown-seattle-pandemic-covid-business-closing-building-bellevue#
GIST	<p>It's just another store shutting its doors in Seattle, no big deal, right? The COVID-19 pandemic led to a lot of openings and closings, throughout the region but this one seems...different.</p> <p>"It's an iconic store," said Lorna Kaneshiro, while shopping downtown with friends. "Everybody knows Nike, yea it's sad."</p> <p>The large Nike store, which opened with great fanfare back in 1996, is now counting down the hours to closing, this Friday, Jan. 20.</p> <p>So why is Nike pulling out of Seattle? The company's not talking, but others certainly have opinions.</p> <p>"A lot of windows broken out a lot of security," said Tammy Jo Avega, who lives in Spanaway.</p> <p>There's even a boarded-up window at the front of the Nike store. Many downtown shoppers and workers KOMO spoke with today cite crime, especially seeing so many security guards parked at the front doors of so many stores.</p> <p>"And I think it's going to have a huge impact on the city," said Betty Aklilu, who earns her living down here on the sidewalks of Seattle. She's been grilling hot dogs for tourists and locals alike, for almost seven</p>

years. Aklilu told KOMO she's been in the right spot for it too, right between the Nike store and Pike Place Market.

"Going to be a huge impact for us because it's part of the downtown," said Aklilu. "When people do come to Seattle, they go to the Nike store."

Chris Merrill, an admitted "sneakerhead" who also works downtown, disagrees.

"If they don't need one, Seattle will get another one, but this flagship store here in Seattle was not worthwhile because I didn't get the shoes, but all the other big Nike stores got," said Merrill.

The Downtown Seattle Association keeps stats on this sort of thing. It says some 500 stores closed downtown, while about 300 opened, just in the last few years, since the Pandemic started.

So where will Nike sneakerheads go now? Bellevue. The permits are in, the signs are up for Nike to move into Bellevue Square this Spring.

"Well, it does fit, Nike is one of those upper brands that seem to fit Bellevue criteria," said Aklilu.

But Merrill told KOMO he's keeping his money on Seattle and new projects here, like the US Bank Center, which is at the same intersection at 6th and Pike, as the Nike Store.

"I think if it looks pretty enough it will drive people in if they want to come cause it's a place they want to come," said Merrill.

The newest numbers from the Downtown Seattle Association show more visitors to the downtown area last month than the year before. More than two million people visited downtown in December 2022, versus the previous December. That's an increase of more than 8%.

The city of Bellevue told KOMO they're in the midst of a retail study right now, but did give me a few data points. Bellevue tells me they get about 95,000 visitors downtown on a Saturday, the busiest day of the week in their downtown. Those visitors have 2,211 retail businesses to explore.

So, while Nike closing, leaving a baron storefront, alongside others downtown, DSA says, "We are excited about several newcomers who have opened their doors in recent months with more on the way."

Uniqlo opened with great fanfare last month. Pandora opened a new store just a block down from Nike. Luke's Lobster also recently opened a store on Pike Street, closer to Pike Place Market. Mendocino Farms is now open on Westlake, with another location expected in Rainier Square.

But, to keep businesses running, the DSA says, "we need to ensure a safe and welcoming environment, something that's been improving in downtown and is top of mind for our city leaders."

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HEADLINE	01/18 SPD chief: public safety downtown Seattle
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-chief-adrian-diaz-2023-chris-daniels-assault-burglary-arrests-up-use-of-force-complaints-down-crime-violence-gun-downtown-investigation-staff-recruit-labor-public-safety#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle Chief of Police Adrian Diaz said his department is now meeting pre-pandemic numbers in enforcement for assault and burglary arrests, and dramatically lowered use-of-force complaints despite lower staffing numbers.</p> <p>Diaz made the comments in a wide-ranging interview with KOMO News, and said he does believe return-to-office and economic vitality is important to maintaining public safety in downtown Seattle.</p>

	<p>“You have to focus on economic development to actually to address a lot of public safety issues,” Diaz said. “If I have some of the businesses that actually, could we get people to return their employees to work, and actually be in businesses and restaurants and do shopping and, and being actually visible presence on the streets, it helps us lower crime rates.”</p> <p>Diaz has now officially removed the "interim" label after a swearing-in ceremony last week, but has been in the position since the tumultuous summer of 2020 that put the department’s use-of-force techniques and funding in the spotlight.</p> <p>Diaz highlighted that publicly available data shows his department made more arrests in 2022 for assault than in 2019, and the same holds true in burglary cases. At the same time, Diaz said his department recovered more guns than only one other year in history. At the same time, internal data suggested “use-of-force” complaints about SPD at the lowest point in seven years, with formal investigations at the Office of Police Accountability at the lowest mark since 2019. He said the metrics are even though his department is down 375 officers from what he would consider normal staffing.</p> <p>Still, he said the labor issues have impacted certain types of investigations and call response times are longer than he would like.</p> <p>Yet, “When it comes down to priority one, and that's really been my focus is just really being laser focused on priority one type response and violent crime," Diaz said. "We’ve seen actually our response to priority ones drop, and we went from 7.5 minutes to 7.2 minutes.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Covid variants escape immune system
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/new-covid-variants-are-escaping-the-immune-system-heres-what-that-means?ref=home
GIST	<p>BA.5, BQ.1.1, and XBB? It’s no wonder people are struggling to keep all the circulating variants of COVID-19 straight right now. Whether you want to call them “alphabet soup,” “Scrabble,” or “Kraken,” we’ve been reminded time and again that it’s not the name of the subvariant that matters, but rather the way it interacts with our immune systems. And as we enter into our fourth year with COVID-19, scientists are most concerned with how well prior infections, vaccinations, and boosters can protect us against emerging variants of the virus.</p> <p>The answers are starting to roll in—and they’re not looking great for us. In a letter published on Jan. 18 in The New England Journal of Medicine, researchers from Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Los Alamos National Laboratory detail the nasty abilities of variants BQ.1.1 and XBB.1 to escape incapacitation from COVID-specific antibodies. This is cause for concern because as the authors wrote, these variants “may reduce the efficacy of current mRNA vaccines.”</p> <p>Before Aug. 31 in the U.S., available COVID-19 boosters were monovalent, meaning they contained viral genetic material from one strain of the virus. The updated boosters are bivalent and were created with genetic material from the original COVID-19 strain as well as Omicron variant strains with the hope of offering better protection against new and emerging variants.</p> <p>Unfortunately, these early data seem to show that two of the newest variants can dodge even the bivalent boosters. In their study, the researchers took serum samples from 16 people who received a monovalent booster in 2021, 15 who received a monovalent booster in 2022, and 18 people who received a bivalent booster in September 2022. In all three cohorts, the concentration of neutralizing antibodies—which immobilize copies of the virus and prevent them from infecting cells—fighting the original Wuhan strain shot up after participants received boosters, from the hundreds or thousands to the tens of thousands.</p> <p>But their immune response against some of the newest viral variants was severely diminished, even compared to ones that came directly before. The authors found that neutralizing antibody concentrations to variants BQ.1.1 and XBB.1 were between 53 and 232 times lower than those to the original strain of</p>

	<p>COVID-19, depending on the booster received. These variants were even better than a recent Omicron variant at evading the immune system and escaping neutralizing antibodies.</p> <p>On Jan. 11, the World Health Organization released a risk assessment about XBB.1.5, writing that BQ and XBB variants are “the most antibody-resistant variants to date” but cautioning that “[t]here is currently no data on real world vaccine effectiveness against severe disease or death” for these variants.</p> <p>It’s clear that these variants aren’t good news, but future research is needed to suss out just how bad they will turn out to be. This study is one early indication that as sick as we might be of the COVID-19 pandemic, we aren’t out of the woods just yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Congo: mass graves after militia attack
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/congo-49-bodies-found-mass-graves-after-militia-96514816
GIST	<p>KINSHASA, Congo -- Mass graves containing the bodies of 49 civilians have been discovered in northeastern Congo after a series of weekend attacks blamed on a local militia, the United Nations said Wednesday.</p> <p>U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters in New York that the graves had been uncovered in two villages in Ituri province, about (19 miles) 30 kilometers east of the town of Bunia.</p> <p>A total of 42 victims, including six children, had been discovered in a mass grave in the village of Nyamamba, while the bodies of seven other men were found in another village, Mbogi, Haq added.</p> <p>“Peacekeepers launched a patrol to the area immediately after receiving reports of attacks on civilians by the CODECO militias over the weekend. This is when they made the gruesome discoveries,” Haq said in New York.</p> <p>Local authorities have said that CODECO — Cooperative for the Development of Congo — militants also abducted a number of women during the attacks on the villages.</p> <p>Last June, seven CODECO factions announced an end to violence against civilians in Ituri, mainly in the Djugu territory where they were very active. Yet they have gradually resumed with attacks in the area.</p> <p>At least 195 people have been killed since December in a series of attacks blamed on the CODECO militia and other armed groups, the U.N. said. More than 1.5 million people in Ituri province have been displaced by fighting.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 NKorea sustains high defense spending
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/north-korea-sustains-high-defense-spending-new-budget-96524099
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea’s rubber-stamp parliament has passed a budget that sustains a high level of defense spending despite economic troubles as leader Kim Jong Un pushes for an aggressive expansion of his nuclear arsenal amid stalled diplomacy.</p> <p>State media reports indicated Kim didn't attend the Supreme People's Assembly’s two-day session that ended Wednesday. Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency didn't mention any comments by assembly members toward the United States or South Korea in its report of the meetings on Thursday.</p> <p>The assembly convened weeks after Kim called for an “exponential increase” of nuclear warheads, mass production of battlefield tactical nuclear weapons targeting “enemy” South Korea and the development of more advanced intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to reach the U.S. mainland.</p>

His statements during a major political conference in December underscored an intensifying nuclear standoff with the United States and its allies in Asia after he pushed North Korea's weapons tests to a record pace in 2022.

The North fired more than 70 missiles last year, including multiple ICBM launches, and conducted a series of tests it described as simulated nuclear attacks on South Korean and U.S. targets.

Analysts say Kim's aggressive arms expansion and escalatory nuclear doctrine are aimed at forcing the United States to accept the idea of North Korea as a nuclear power and to negotiate economic and security concessions from a position of strength.

KCNA said the assembly's members projected overall state spending would increase by 1.7% this year but made no mention of the actual size of the budget.

The assembly's members devoted 15.9% of this year's national budget to defense spending, the same proportion as last year, to support efforts on "further bolstering up the war deterrence both in quality and quantity" and "defending the dignity and security of the country and the people," KCNA said.

It's difficult to gauge how much money North Korea would be spending on its military capabilities, considering the poor quality of the limited statistics it discloses.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2021 World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers report, North Korea possibly spent around \$4 billion on defense in 2019, which would have amounted to 26% of its estimated gross domestic product, the highest proportion among 170 countries it reviewed.

KCNA's report on the assembly meetings hinted that North Korea was struggling to revive a moribund economy battered by mismanagement, U.S.-led sanctions over Kim's nuclear ambitions, and COVID-19-related border closures.

Finance Minister Ko Jong Bom lamented unspecified shortcomings in raising tax revenues from state companies. He called for economic workers to strengthen their "ideological resolve" and put broader national interests before the interests of their specific units, KCNA said.

The assembly's members also passed a new law aimed at protecting the "cultured" dialect specific to the capital Pyongyang region, apparently the country's latest step to stem South Korean and other foreign cultural influences.

They also discussed strengthening the surveillance activities of the Central Public Prosecutors Office to establish "revolutionary law-abiding spirit," underscoring how Kim's government continues to strengthen its control of its people in face of the deepening economic challenges.

Kim last appeared at the assembly in September, when he defiantly stated his country would never abandon the nuclear weapons he clearly sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

The assembly's members then passed legislation that authorized preemptive nuclear attacks in a broad range of scenarios where it may perceive its leadership as under threat, which included conventional clashes or conflicts that wouldn't necessarily amount to war.

Alarmed by the growing North Korean nuclear threat, South Korea and Japan are scrambling to strengthen their defense postures in conjunction with their alliances with the United States.

In an interview with The Associated Press last week, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said his government was engaged in discussions with the Biden administration over joint military planning potentially involving U.S. nuclear assets.

	<p>The allies are planning to hold a tabletop exercise next month aimed at sharpening their response to where North Korea uses a nuclear weapon. Yoon's government has also said it would call for Washington to deploy strategic military assets near the Korean Peninsula more frequently.</p> <p>In December, Japan made a major break from its strictly self-defense-only postwar principle by adopting a new national security strategy that includes goals to acquire preemptive strike capabilities and cruise missiles in face of growing threats from North Korea, China and Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 French protest retirement rules change plan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/strikes-protests-test-french-plan-raise-retirement-age-96524287
GIST	<p>PARIS -- French workers angry over proposed changes to retirement rules are halting high-speed trains, disrupting electricity supplies and taking to the streets Thursday in a day of nationwide strikes and protests seen as a major test for Emmanuel Macron and his presidency.</p> <p>French workers would have to work longer before receiving a pension under the new rules – with the nominal retirement age rising from 62 to 64. In a country with an aging population and growing life expectancy where everyone receives a state pension, Macron's government says the reform is the only way to keep the system solvent.</p> <p>Unions argue the pension overhaul threatens hard-fought rights, and propose a tax on the wealthy or more payroll contributions from employers to finance the pension system. Polls suggest most French people oppose the reform.</p> <p>More than 200 rallies are expected around France on Thursday, including a large one in Paris involving all France's unions.</p> <p>Police unions opposed to the retirement reform are also taking part; those who aren't protesting are bracing for potential violence if extremist groups join the demonstrations.</p> <p>A majority of trains around France are cancelled, including some international connections, according to the SNCF rail authority. About 20% of flights out of Paris' Orly Airport are canceled and airlines are warning of delays.</p> <p>Electricity workers pledged to reduce power supplies as a form of protest, and some 70% of preschool and primary school teachers said they would refuse to work Thursday, according to French media reports. Even high school student unions are expected to join the protests by blocking access to some schools.</p> <p>The French government is formally presenting the pension bill on Monday and it heads to Parliament next month. Its success will depend in part on the scale and duration of the strikes and protests.</p> <p>Protracted strikes met Macron's last effort to raise the retirement age in 2019 and he eventually withdrew it after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 China: western media Covid coverage 'bias'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-accuses-western-media-covid-19-coverage-bias-96524870
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China on Thursday accused "some Western media" of bias, smears and political manipulation in their coverage of China's abrupt ending of its strict "zero-COVID" policy, as it issued a vigorous defense of actions taken to prepare for the change of strategy.</p>

The move in December to end mass testing and quarantines led to a sharp rise in cases, with some hospitals and crematoriums overwhelmed with victims.

An editorial in the ruling Communist Party mouthpiece People's Daily outlined what it called China's "optimization and control measures" and blasted reports by media outlets they didn't identify as "completely biased hype, smear and political manipulation with ulterior motives."

Since the initial wave of new cases, life in much of China has largely returned to normal, although officials have expressed concern about a further spread of the virus into the countryside during the Lunar New Year travel rush now underway.

Despite that, the editorial said many localities have "passed the peak of the epidemic, and production and life are speeding up to return to normal."

"Zero-COVID," as the strategy came to be known, sought to track and isolate every case of infection, along with those who had contact with them and even third-hand contacts. It confined millions of people in cities such as Shanghai to their homes for two months or longer, with many suffering from food shortages and lack of access to health care.

China strongly defended the policy but began dismantling it under economic pressure and after highly rare street protests broke out in Beijing and other major cities denouncing the ruling party and its leader, Xi Jinping. On Jan. 8, it took the further step of eliminating the requirement that those arriving from abroad undergo lengthy and expensive quarantines.

China rejected both foreign and domestic criticism of the policy's excesses, denouncing earlier calls from the World Health Organization for it to adjust to changes in the nature of the virus, calling them "irresponsible."

That made the abrupt mid-winter shift to a policy of merely seeking to prevent the most serious cases all the more jarring for the population, many of whom have defied censors to express anger online. Virtually overnight, testing stations where people had stood in long lines disappeared, while field hospitals used to quarantine millions simply packed up.

China also ceased publishing figures on new cases and deaths, which it had long been suspected of underreporting, leading to further complaints from the WHO and foreign nations about a lack of transparency. Unconfirmed estimates now put numbers of new cases at tens of thousands a day, with up to 85% of the population in some provinces having become infected.

China has also rejected calls to release more data and provide more information about the origin of the virus, first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, accusing those making the requests of "politicizing" the issue.

The government has also lashed out at countries that require travelers coming from China to show a negative virus test, calling the demand "discriminatory" even though it requires the same of anyone entering China.

That defensive attitude was reflected in the People's Daily editorial, which said: "Thanks to meticulous medical preparations, sufficient production capacity reserves, and strong organizational planning and equipment, China has smoothly passed the adaptation period after the 'transition' and 'shift' of the epidemic prevention policy."

"In the face of China's prevention and control achievements, any political manipulation is pale and powerless," it added, citing endorsements from academics in Nigeria, Kenya and Russia, all close Chinese diplomatic partners.

	"All parties should focus on fighting the epidemic itself, avoid any words or deeds that politicize the epidemic, strengthen solidarity and cooperation, and work together to defeat the epidemic," the editorial said.
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HEADLINE	01/18 TN traffic stop death prompts federal probe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/death-black-man-after-traffic-stop-prompts-federal/story?id=96516880
GIST	<p>The FBI and the Justice Department have opened a coordinated civil rights investigation into the recent death of a Memphis man after a confrontation with police, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee Kevin G. Ritz announced.</p> <p>This investigation into the death of Tyre Nichols is in addition to investigative efforts from the Memphis Police Department and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.</p> <p>Nichols, 29, was stopped by police on Jan. 7 for alleged reckless driving in Memphis, according to press releases from the Memphis Police Department and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.</p> <p>During the encounter with officers, Nichols allegedly ran away when approached, causing the officers to pursue Nichols and ultimately apprehend him, police said. Nichols was hospitalized in critical condition after complaining of shortness of breath during the arrest and died three days later, police said. Nichols' cause of death has yet to be released.</p> <p>"State authorities have publicly announced that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation is investigating. In addition, the United States Attorney's Office, in coordination with the FBI Memphis Field Office and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, has opened a civil rights investigation," Ritz said in a statement.</p> <p>Ritz added, "As this is an open investigation, we are not able to provide additional comments or release further information at this time."</p> <p>Due to Nichols' hospitalization, the Shelby County District Attorney's Office was contacted, and TBI special agents were subsequently requested to conduct a use-of-force investigation, according to the TBI.</p> <p>Body camera footage of the incident has not yet been released.</p> <p>In a statement from Shelby County District Attorney's Office, the office said they are committed to "transparency."</p> <p>"We're working with the appropriate agencies to determine how quickly we can release the video and will do so as soon as we can. We'll be sure to update the public throughout this process," the statement added.</p> <p>The death of Nichols sparked protests throughout the weekend in Memphis calling for the release of footage from the officer-worn body cameras.</p> <p>Mayor Jim Strickland and Memphis Police Chief CJ Davis said the video will be released "after the family of Mr. Nichols has had the opportunity to review the video privately," according to a joint statement.</p> <p>The investigation should be completed by the end of this week, according to the joint statement.</p> <p>Civil rights attorney Ben Crump is representing Nichols' family in the case.</p> <p>"All of the available information tells us that this was the tragic and preventable death of a young man deeply beloved by his family and community," Crump said. "This kind of in-custody death destroys community trust if agencies are not swiftly transparent. The most effective way for the Memphis Police</p>

	<p>Department to be transparent with the grieving Nichols family and the Memphis community is to release the body camera and surveillance footage from the traffic stop."</p> <p>He added, "Nobody should ever die from a simple traffic stop -- the footage is the only way to discern the true narrative of why and how that happened to Tyre."</p> <p>The Memphis Police Department said the "officers involved will be routinely relieved of duty pending the outcome of" the TBI's investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Spotlight: fatal shootings by armed civilians
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/fatal-taqueria-robber-shooting-casts-scrutiny-armed-civilians/story?id=96363320
GIST	<p>As a Texas grand jury weighs whether to charge an armed civilian in the fatal shooting this month of an alleged robber inside a Texas taqueria, the case has cast a spotlight on people taking the law into their own hands.</p> <p>A combination of a proliferation of guns, "stand your ground" states, concealed carry permit holders and a growing lack of confidence in police to protect communities appear to be fueling a spike in incidents of U.S. citizens intervening in what they perceive to be crime, law enforcement experts told ABC News.</p> <p>In addition to the taqueria robbery shooting, the episodes over the past month include a man fatally shot by an alleged car burglar he confronted in New Mexico and a Missouri woman charged with murder for allegedly killing a man she caught riding in her stolen car and shooting two innocent bystanders. A Washington, D.C., homeowner who killed an unarmed 13-year-old boy he suspected of breaking into vehicles has also prompted calls for his arrest by community activists.</p> <p>"The perception that you cannot rely on law enforcement to prevent crimes, resolve crime, in a way that they used to, I think that does play a big part," T. Markus Funk, a former Illinois federal prosecutor and an adjunct professor at the University of Colorado Boulder Law School, told ABC News.</p> <p>Lack of solid data</p> <p>Statistics on such incidents are scarce with no centralized federal or local law enforcement agency keeping track. The lack of solid data makes it difficult to determine if there has been an increase in civilians intervening in crimes, experts said.</p> <p>FBI data shows the number of homicides by civilians classified as justifiable has increased annually from 286 in 2014 to 386 in 2019. The FBI's annual crime statistics, however, lack details of the circumstances involved in each incident other than reporting guns were used in the vast majority of them.</p> <p>"It's hard to really determine whether it's going up, whether this as an issue that is actually getting worse or if it's being reported more, or if it's the result of something like the access to weapons, especially illegal ones," Keith Taylor, an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a retired New York Police Department officer, told ABC News.</p> <p>Anecdotally, Taylor and Funk said it appears that more civilians are taking matters into their own hands rather than relying on police to solve crimes.</p> <p>In several recent incidents in New Jersey, civilian groups have taken it upon themselves to conduct vigilante sting operations to catch child sex predators by posing as minors in internet chat rooms. Prosecutors said the vigilante groups have recorded YouTube videos of them confronting alleged child predators when they show up at prearranged rendezvous before calling the police, officials said.</p> <p>The Bergen County, New Jersey, Prosecutor's Office released a statement in December discouraging such vigilante activity.</p>

"Bergen County law enforcement strongly discourages this activity, which holds the potential for violence and injury to the individuals involved as well as innocent bystanders," the statement reads. "It also jeopardizes the due process rights of potential targets, puts private citizens in danger, and risks involving law enforcement in illegal activity."

Gun ownership skyrockets

Adding to the dangers of such confrontations is the proliferation of armed civilians, law enforcement experts said.

Politicians pandering for votes and gun-rights groups have also helped prompt the surge in gun ownership by fanning the perception that crime nationwide is running rampant and using the Second Amendment to "push this narrative of the necessity of more individual gun ownership," Taylor said.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of concealed handgun permits issued nationwide has skyrocketed to more than 22 million, a 48% increase since 2016, according to studies by the Crime Prevention Research Center. In 2022, concealed gun permit holders grew by about 488,000, up 2.3% from 2021, the studies show.

In addition to the jump in concealed handgun permits, the number of states adopting some type of "stand your ground" self-defense laws have increased to 38 in 2023 from 24 in 2012.

"If individuals feel that their local government, their local public safety entities are unable to do the job of sufficiently protecting them, then this idea of taking matters into your own hands becomes more palatable," Taylor said. "The general public may not understand that when an individual decides to take action as a vigilante, the police may think that person is the shooter and kill them."

In June 2021, a 40-year-old man fatally shot an armed suspect who gunned down a police officer in downtown Arvada, Colorado, according to the [Arvada Police Department](#). A police officer responding to the incident fatally shot the good Samaritan when he saw him holding the cop killer's AR-15 rifle, officials said.

String of recent incidents

Recent incidents that have ended in either a good Samaritan being killed or ending up charged after intervening in perceived crimes, include:

- The Jan. 5 shooting at The Ranchito #4 taqueria in southwest Houston, where surveillance video captured a 46-year-old diner shooting an alleged masked robber nine times, killing him. The alleged perpetrator turned out to be carrying a toy gun. The armed diner, who returned the stolen money to victimized patrons before leaving the scene, was later interviewed by police and prosecutors referred the case to a Harris County grand jury to decide if charges should be filed against the diner. The diner's attorney released a statement saying his client "feared for his life" and under Texas law was justified in using lethal force.
- On Jan. 6, a 30-year-old man was shot to death in Las Cruces, New Mexico, after he confronted a 19-year-old man "he had reason to believe ... was burglarizing vehicles earlier that morning at a nearby Walmart Superstore," according to police. The encounter escalated into a physical confrontation that ended with the victim being fatally shot, police said. The suspect was arrested and charged with felony voluntary manslaughter.
- On Jan. 7, a Washington, D.C., homeowner fatally shot an [unarmed 13-year-old boy](#) he suspected of breaking into cars in his neighborhood at 4 a.m. The shooting prompted community activists to call on prosecutors to file homicide charges against the homeowner, who has not been publicly identified.
- On Dec. 22, a 35-year-old armed woman tracked her stolen car to a gas station in suburban St. Louis and fatally shot a 19-year-old man she found inside the vehicle and a 49-year-old man outside the vehicle, who police said was an innocent bystander. A second innocent bystander was shot in the incident and survived,

	according to police. The woman was arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder and one count of felony assault, police said.
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HEADLINE	01/18 New Zealand prime minister to step down
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/new-zealand-prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-step-time/story?id=96520547
GIST	<p>New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced in an emotional press briefing that she will step down, saying "it's time."</p> <p>Ardern said Thursday she will not be seeking reelection this year and that her term will end by Feb. 7.</p> <p>"This has been the most fulfilling 5 1/2 years of my life, but it has also had its challenges," Ardern said, citing crises from the COVID-19 pandemic to the deadliest mass shooting in New Zealand's history.</p> <p>"But I'm not leaving because it was hard," she said. "I am leaving because with such a privilege comes responsibility -- the responsibility to know when you are the right person to lead, and also, when you are not."</p> <p>Ardern, 42, said she had hoped she would have found a way to prepare for another term over the summer to lead on a "full tank," but that was not the case.</p> <p>"I know what this job takes, and I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice," she said. "It's that simple."</p> <p>Ardern said people may try to determine the "real reason" for her decision, but that this was it.</p> <p>"I am human, politicians are human," she said. "We give all that we can for as long as we can. And then it's time. And for me, it's time."</p> <p>Ardern outlined the next steps for her Labour Party, saying that a caucus vote will be held on Sunday to elect a new leader. If a leader is successfully elected with more than two-thirds of the caucus support, she will issue her resignation "soon after" and a new prime minister will be sworn in.</p> <p>"If no one is able to garner this level of support within caucus, the leadership contest will go to the wider membership," she said.</p> <p>Ardern said she plans to remain a member of the New Zealand Parliament for Mount Albert through April to help the Labour Party "navigate this next phase."</p> <p>Ardern became New Zealand's youngest female prime minister when she was sworn in in 2017 at the age of 37.</p> <p>She cited among the party's accomplishments the "most significant increases in welfare and the state housing stock that we've seen in many decades," as well as setting ambitious targets on climate change and making progress on "issues around our national identity."</p> <p>"I believe that teaching history in schools and celebrating our own indigenous national holiday will all make a difference for years to come," she said.</p> <p>Ardern said she doesn't know what's next for her, though is looking forward to spending time with her family. "Arguably they're the ones that have sacrificed the most out of all of us," she said.</p> <p>Ardern shares a 4-year-old daughter with her partner, Clarke Gayford.</p>

	<p>The prime minister ended her speech by thanking New Zealanders for the opportunity to serve in the "greatest role of my life."</p> <p>"I hope in return I leave behind the belief that you can be kind but strong, empathetic but decisive, optimistic but focused," she said. "That you can be your own kind of leader, one that knows when it's time to go."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/17 Mexico bans smoking in all public places
SOURCE	https://globalnews.ca/news/9416567/mexico-smoking-ban-public-places/
GIST	<p>If you're a tourist who dreams of unwinding with a cigarette on a vacation to Mexico, that fantasy is about to go up in smoke.</p> <p>On Sunday, Mexico enacted one of the world's strictest anti-tobacco laws, completely banning smoking in all public places, including hotels, parks and beaches.</p> <p>The total ban, which is part of Mexico's General Law for Tobacco Control, also forbids the advertising, sponsorship or promotion of any tobacco products. Restrictions for the sale and use of e-cigarettes and vaporizers were also created, though they mostly focus on indoor usage.</p> <p>The measure, which was approved in December 2022, comes as an extension of an existing law from 2008 that prohibited smoking in indoor spaces like restaurants and other businesses. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) praised the move for its attempt to prevent and control chronic non-communicable diseases to do with tobacco use.</p> <p>In a single year, 10 per cent of all deaths in Mexico are attributed to tobacco use or exposure to tobacco smoke, the PAHO wrote in a statement. The rate of daily tobacco use in the country has "remained virtually consistent" since 2002.</p> <p>On Twitter, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, applauded Mexico's smoking ban.</p> <p>"Bravo #Mexico! @WHO welcomes such a bold move on tobacco control," he wrote. "We call on all countries to strengthen #NoTobacco policies and help us prevent 8 million deaths every year!"</p> <p>The BBC reported that some smokers are unhappy with the law that is being called "draconian," as it essentially limits smoking to private domiciles.</p> <p>Mexico is not the first country to implement such a strict ban on smoking. Ireland, Greece, Bulgaria, Malta, Spain and Hungary also have complete bans on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workplaces.</p> <p>In December, lawmakers in New Zealand voted to ban the sale of cigarettes to anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 2009. The unique plan to phase out tobacco smoking will mean that the minimum age to buy cigarettes will go up year by year.</p> <p>Smoking in Canada is already banned in all indoor public spaces, on patios, on public transit and in workplaces. Every day, 100 Canadians die from smoking-related illnesses, according to the Canadian government.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/17 China planted a mole within the FBI
SOURCE	https://www.businessinsider.com/james-bamford-chinese-mole-fbi-cia-spy-network-gutted-2023-1
GIST	The FBI's website carries a stark warning. "The counterintelligence and economic espionage efforts emanating from the government of China," it says, "are a grave threat to the economic well-being and

democratic values of the United States. Confronting this threat is the FBI's top counterintelligence priority." But far worse is the threat to the lives of scores of courageous Chinese agents who have volunteered to spy for the U.S. within their own country. Over the past decade, more than a dozen agents recruited by the CIA have been killed or imprisoned.

And it now turns out that it was an alleged Chinese spy within the FBI's own counterintelligence division who may have been largely responsible. A spy whose activities went undetected for upwards of two decades, until his quiet arrest in 2020. Currently in a Hawaiian jail, his little-known case is wrapped in layers of secrecy as he awaits trial. Now in his new book, "Spyfail: Foreign Spies, Moles, Saboteurs and the Collapse of America's Counterintelligence," author James Bamford peels back many of those hidden layers.

THE RENDEZVOUS

In the spring of 2001, Chinese intelligence was on a very big roll. On April 1, a Navy EP-3 electronic spy plane, operated by the National Security Agency and on patrol along the Chinese coast, was forced to make an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island. After evacuating the crew, Chinese intelligence agents went to work extracting some of the agency's most secret espionage and cryptologic equipment, along with piles of documents classified above top secret. An enormous windfall, the hardware, software, and documents gave Chinese intelligence critical insight into the NSA's targets in their country, and the methods used to spy on them. And less than a week earlier, Chinese intelligence came upon another intelligence bonanza when two former CIA clandestine officers, one born in Shanghai and the other in Hong Kong, agreed to change sides.

At the time, four years after the handover from Britain to China, much of Hong Kong remained a world of neon and noise. But now a great many of the tourists haggling over Rolex watches, checking into the Peninsula, and packing Lan Kwai Fong and other nightlife districts had a decidedly Mandarin accent. "Five years ago, everyone looked down on you if you spoke Mandarin," said a Beijing executive living in Hong Kong. "Now, they know we're the big bosses with the money."

Despite predictions that the former colony would turn into a gray vista of hunched workers and nameless noodle shops, travelers from mainland China had become the principal source of visitors to Hong Kong. They were even spending more per capita than their American and Japanese counterparts. And March 2001 was an especially busy time. As soon as the Hong Kong Arts Festival ended, the Hong Kong International Film Festival began.

Deep in the shadows, the city had also become a major crossroads for Eastern and Western spies. "Hong Kong is a place where foreign intelligence agencies conduct a lot of activity," admitted Li Gang, the deputy director of Beijing's Liaison Office in the city. As the arts crowd checked out of their rooms and the film fans checked in, two former American spies quietly slipped into another hotel for a discreet rendezvous with their Chinese counterparts. They were brothers who had both worked as clandestine CIA officers in China, and now they were about to switch sides.

Alexander Yuk Ching Ma and his older brother David were both veterans of the CIA's clandestine operations division. David was born in Shanghai in 1935, a time of smoky jazz clubs, bustling casinos, and opium dens. The Pudong District, on the eastern bank of the Huangpu River, became the country's major financial hub, and decades later it would also become its high-tech eavesdropping hub.

In 1961, at the age of twenty-six, David moved to Los Angeles, became a naturalized U.S. citizen, and six years later joined the CIA in an entry-level capacity, possibly as a translator. But in the late 1960s the United States was in the middle of its desperate war with North Vietnam, which was aided by China. As a result, a throng of new recruits were continuously making their way to Camp Perry, known as "The Farm," the CIA's boot camp for spies, near Williamsburg, Virginia.

The problem was, nearly all had the physical appearance of cheering fans at a Notre Dame football game. Few would blend into a crowd on a street in Asia. Also, very few spoke Chinese or Vietnamese, especially with any fluency. That was good for David, and in 1971 he was promoted to the officer ranks within the

CIA's clandestine service. Entrusted with the identities of many of the agency's human sources in China and elsewhere, as well as its system of covert communications (known as "covcom"), he spent years in the Far East.

In 1983, David resigned after it was determined that he was inappropriately using his government position to assist Chinese nationals in obtaining entry into the United States. But months before, as if taking his place, his thirty-year-old brother Alex had joined up and also became a clandestine officer. He was born in Hong Kong and, like David, lived for a time in Shanghai. Both also graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Following extensive training at The Farm, he was also provided with the identities of the agency's networks of spies, the various covcom details, and was sent to the Far East. Seven years later he left the agency, and around 1995 he moved to China, there oddly being no restrictions on former spies moving to their target nations. Therefore, little is known about his activities there.

David, however, ran into serious legal and financial trouble. In 1998, while living in Los Angeles, he pled guilty to two counts of defrauding a lending institution. In December he began serving a five-month sentence at Taft Correctional Institution, a low-security federal prison near Bakersfield, California, followed by five years of probation and \$145,623 in restitution — money he didn't have. Then in 2000, his brother Alex returned from China, telling Customs and Border Protection officers that he was an "importer and exporter" and was carrying \$9,000 in U.S. currency. Not long after, both brothers turned up in Shanghai.

For three days, beginning on March 24, 2001, Alex and David allegedly met secretly in a hotel room with at least five officials from China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) and passed on highly classified information. According to government charges, details included the covers used by CIA officers and CIA activities in China; cryptographic information used in classified and sensitive CIA communications and reports; information concerning CIA officer identities as well as those of CIA human assets in China; the CIA's use of operational tradecraft; and CIA secure communications practices — that is, covcom details. The brothers were then handed \$50,000 in cash.

Afterward, as laid out in the indictment, both Alex and David returned to California, but they kept in touch with their handlers. Alex eventually agreed to become a mole for China's intelligence service within the FBI, and on the day after Christmas 2002, he applied for the position of special agent. By then, however, he was about forty-nine years old and was informed that he was over the age limit.

But in 2004 he was nevertheless hired as a Chinese translator since he spoke several Chinese dialects. In many ways, this was an even better position for a spy since he would have access to a very broad range of information, including intercepted Chinese conversations. The day before he started his new job, he called a suspected accomplice, possibly David, to give him the good news that he would now be working full-time for "the other side."

By then the FBI was reeling from another extremely damaging, and extremely embarrassing, counterintelligence disaster involving China. In 2003 it was discovered that the bureau's key U.S.-based China asset, Katrina Leung, was, like Alex, a double agent working for China. Worse, she was simultaneously sleeping with two of the FBI's top China agents. Among them was her longtime handler, through whom she had been passing false information for more than a decade, information that often was quickly passed on to the White House.

Assigned to the Honolulu FBI office, Alex and his wife moved into a \$600,000 condominium on Hawaii Kai Drive, a short walk to the ocean on the southeastern corner of Oahu. Strongly built, with a broad natural grin, Alex wore squarish glasses above puffy cheeks that seemed to glow when he smiled, which was often. Over at least the next six years and possibly much longer, he took over the role of FBI mole where Robert Hanssen, who spied for Russia for more than two decades, left off, except for a different spymaster. It was as though no lessons had ever been learned by the bureau.

The method was simple. Attracting no suspicion, Ma would gather up piles of highly secret materials and simply walk out the door with them, just as Hanssen had done for decades. Some he photographed with a

digital camera, others he downloaded from his computer onto a flash drive, while still others he copied onto CD-ROM discs. Some dealt with guided missiles and weapon systems, and others revealed the identity of confidential sources, putting their lives at risk.

In addition, Ma had extensive knowledge of the CIA's highly secret covcom techniques by which CIA officers communicated with their sources. Every few months, once he had accumulated a load of secrets, he would call his handlers. They would then book him a hotel room in Shanghai, pick him up at the airport, and take him into town, where he would hand over his secrets and be debriefed by agents of the Shanghai State Security Bureau (SSSB).

The SSSB was the regional office of the Ministry of State Security, China's equivalent of both the CIA and FBI. Headquartered in Beijing at Xiyuan (Western Garden), next to the vast ensemble of lakes, gardens, and palaces of the Summer Palace, its logo still displays the hammer and sickle of the Communist Party. At the time, it was run by Minister of State Security Xu Yongyue, a stern-faced senior party official from Zhenping County, the jade capital of China, in the province of Henan. And in charge of the SSSB was Cai Xumin, who received a very significant promotion to vice minister of the MSS in 2004, likely due to his recruitment of Ma.

Following the rendezvous and document drops in Shanghai, Ma would simply fly back to Honolulu. At one point a curious U.S. customs official pulled him aside for a secondary search and discovered he was carrying \$20,000 in cash and a shiny new set of golf clubs. But no questions were raised, no actions were taken, and later that day Ma sent an email to his SSSB handler with an attachment containing additional classified information. Other money paid to him by the MSS was regularly deposited in a bank account in Hong Kong.

David Ma also secretly remained in the loop. Living in Arcadia, a wealthy Los Angeles bedroom community, he established himself as a consultant on immigration rights for the many Asian immigrants in the nearby communities, such as Alhambra and Monterey Park. Familiar with their needs and fluent in various Chinese dialects, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghai, and Chaozhou, he opened several businesses. They included the Chinese American Civil Rights Organization and AsiAmerica Immigration & Consultancy, Inc.

Ironically, in 2005 he was quoted in a Los Angeles Times article about Chinese espionage. As China's economy continued to boom, he said, he could understand the temptation of some Chinese Americans who wanted to do business there to help the government any way they could. "I'm not saying all of them are spies," he said. "But for some of them it is outright greed because they need to do business with [the Chinese government]. It's just like barter or exchange."

Because of his businesses, David became very well known within the Chinese communities in Los Angeles, which was ideal for the SSSB and MSS. Critical for them was discovering community members who had become confidential informants on China for the CIA and FBI. In February 2006, Alex Ma, China's mole in the FBI, sent David photos he received from his handlers of five suspected human sources. Accompanying the pictures was a photo of five dogs sitting on a park bench, which was a coded way of asking him to supply the identity of the sources. Shortly thereafter, David sent Alex an email identifying two of the informants. And a memory card belonging to Alex had pictures of the five sources along with a list of five names.

A few months later, Alex arranged for his wife, Amy Ma, who was also born in Hong Kong, to fly to Shanghai to meet with his handlers and to deliver an encrypted laptop computer to them. An email message soon came back thanking him for sending his wife and delivering "the present." Over the years, without suspicion, Alex continued to fly back and forth to Shanghai every few months with stashes of secrets. And in June 2008, his handler phoned him to say that his "company" would have a lot of work orders in the coming year.

In May 2010, a few months after another clandestine rendezvous to hand over documents to his handler, Alex received a phone call from an MSS officer apologizing for not seeing him during a recent visit to

China and extending an invitation to meet in Shanghai in the future. He also asked Alex to get in touch with David and see if he would be willing to discuss their "business venture." About the same time, the MSS was also bringing on board another veteran CIA clandestine officer, one who had just reapplied to the agency, possibly to become a mole. Known as Zhen Cheng Li in China, he was Jerry Chun Shing Lee to his colleagues at Langley.

Born in Hong Kong like Alex, Lee grew up in Hawaii and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. At seventeen, in 1982, he joined the U.S. Army, serving for four years but remaining in the reserves. A few years later he enrolled at Hawaii Pacific University, graduating in 1992 with a degree in international business management. A year later he earned a master's degree in human resource management and shortly thereafter joined the CIA as a case officer in the clandestine service. Over the following fourteen years, he was dispatched on numerous overseas assignments, including to China, where he, like Alex and David Ma, had access to the agency's clandestine networks, both human and covcom.

By July 2007, Lee had become frustrated by his lack of advancement at the CIA. "He was quite critical about the organization and his time there; the fact that he didn't get credit, he didn't get promoted, he didn't get the assignments he deserved," said one of his associates. As a result, Lee resigned and moved to Hong Kong, taking a job with Japan Tobacco International (JTI). Employing about forty thousand people around the world, the company sells 120 brands of cigarettes, including both Camel and Winston outside the United States.

But a key problem for the company was tobacco smugglers and counterfeiters. Asian crime syndicates were exporting tons of counterfeit cigarettes out of China with the help of corrupt officials. To combat the syndicates, the company had established a Brand Integrity Unit under a veteran CIA officer, David Reynolds, who had worked at the agency from 1988 to 2002. Afterward he was assigned as a U.S. consular officer in Guangzhou for two years. Lee claimed that his last job at the CIA was the agency's official liaison in Beijing to Chinese intelligence, the MSS, and he was hired by Reynolds.

Now, with an office on the forty-second floor of Tower 1 in Times Square, the city's flashy, upscale shopping and restaurant complex at Causeway Bay, Lee could see all of Hong Kong spread out below him. But adjusting to private industry was difficult and he soon ran into problems. Company officials began to suspect that he was alerting corrupt Chinese officials about the firm's investigations and the pending raids and arrests by law enforcement. "Several of the shipments of counterfeits purchased as part of the investigations were seized by the Chinese authorities or simply disappeared, and one of our contract investigators was arrested and imprisoned in China," said a manager.

All evidence pointed toward Lee, and as a result, executives at JTI alerted the FBI, but apparently no action was ever taken. Lee was finally fired in mid-2009, and soon afterward a Chinese official warned the company that he was not only continuing to share information with MSS officers, but was also actively working with them. And once again JTI officials passed the information to the FBI. "I certainly reported it to the appropriate authorities," said a company supervisor. It was good information, but once again it seemed to go nowhere within the bureau. At about the same time, Lee hooked up with a potential business partner, Barry Cheung Kam-lun, a former Hong Kong police officer who, Lee knew, had close ties to the MSS. And on April 26 the two traveled across the Hong Kong border to neighboring Shenzhen for a private dinner with MSS officers.

It was time for the official pitch. After excusing Barry, the intelligence officers and Lee reached an agreement that he would begin passing secrets to them and act as their spy. In exchange, they handed him a briefcase full of cash, \$100,000, along with an agreement to take care of him "for life." It would be the first of hundreds of thousands of dollars he would receive, and within a few weeks he began receiving his taskings, key among them apparently becoming a mole in the CIA, as Alex Ma had done in the FBI. That same month, he applied for reemployment with the CIA. But given his less than illustrious career and departure from the agency, it went nowhere.

Instead, possibly as a cover, Lee and Barry Cheung Kam-lun established their own company, FTM International, to enter the "Big Tobacco" wars and conduct their own brand integrity investigations. After

investing nearly \$400,000, they set up shop in the down-market Wan Chai area, renting space in Dannies House. Unlike JTI's soaring skyscraper in Times Square, Lee's new office was in a tired thirteen-story orange high-rise with battered air-conditioning units stuck out the windows like giant steel bird feeders.

But two years later, fed up with Hong Kong and having run out of secrets to sell, Lee decided to move his family back to Virginia, where he had been offered a potential job by the CIA. It had been secretly created to lure him back to the United States, and in August 2012, during a three-day stopover in Hawaii, agents conducted a black bag job on his hotel room. What they found was damning. Inside a small, clear plastic travel pack was a forty-nine-page datebook and a twenty-one-page address book, both of which contained top secret handwritten operational notes from his CIA days. Most critically, they included the true names of secret human sources as well as the dates and operational locations of the meetings. Another clandestine search was conducted on his hotel room in Fairfax, Virginia, soon after he arrived, and the information remained in his possession.

But inexplicably, rather than Lee being arrested, the decision was made to simply question him repeatedly over the following year. Finally, after the fifth interview in June 2013, with the questions becoming more and more revealing of what the bureau knew, Lee fled with his family back to China-controlled Hong Kong. Once more he was out of reach, and once more the FBI had bungled it.

Over the next few years, Lee did security work for the cosmetics company Estée Lauder and the auction house Christie's. Then in January 2018, apparently believing the danger had blown over, he boarded a Cathay Pacific flight to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. It was a serious mistake. His name had been flagged on the airline's manifest and he was arrested as soon as he landed. After first vowing to fight the espionage charges, in May 2019 he agreed to plead guilty and was sentenced to nineteen years in prison.

Around the same time, the FBI finally discovered the Chinese mole who had bored his way into the organization sixteen years earlier. In August 2020, an agent posing as an MSS officer approached Alex Ma in Honolulu and snared him in a sting operation. To convince Ma of his bona fides, he showed him a video of the meeting between him, David, and the SSSB agents at the time they signed on as spies in 2001. The pretend MSS officer then offered Ma \$2,000 in cash as a "small token" of appreciation for Ma's assistance to China. Ma offered to continue working for the MSS and stated that he wanted "the motherland" to succeed. Shortly afterward he was arrested on charges of espionage and is currently awaiting trial. With regard to David, then eighty-five years old, the decision was made not to arrest him due to his advanced stage of Alzheimer's disease.

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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/18 Report: hate, extremism up online gaming
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/hate-extremism-up-online-gaming-lawmakers-want-answers/ZPW7UZNHEFCKLB2CXDYM5D76HM/
GIST	<p>Lawmakers ask online gaming companies for details, after report reveals increase in hate and extremism on platforms</p> <p>Lawmakers want answers after a new report documents an increase in hate and extremism in online gaming. A group in Congress is asking gaming companies what they're doing about the findings of the Anti-Defamation League report.</p> <p>"We wanted to give a place, safe space, not safe space, but safe place or as all-inclusive group setting where people can just come and enjoy themselves and have fun," DC Gaming Group Co-Host Jonathan Smith said.</p>

But that's not always the case, according to the report from the Anti-Defamation League. It says four out of five adults experienced harassment in online multiplayer games. The ADL reports exposure to white supremacy is also on the rise, more than doubling from 2021 to 2022.

That hit home with Massachusetts Congresswoman Lori Trahan. She is also a mom.

"It was difficult to read," Trahan said.

She and a group of lawmakers sent letters to more than a dozen gaming companies. They ask questions about how the platforms deal with and combat these behaviors.

"We have to send a strong message to the companies that both chambers of Congress are watching what they're doing or not doing to prioritize safety for gamers," she said.

The Democrat explained she's received answers from some of the companies. Her office is still examining them.

In response to the report, the Entertainment Software Association said the industry goes "to great lengths" to create "a healthy, safe and inclusive environment." a statement points to "clear codes of conduct that set expectations for acceptable behavior," "serious consequences" for those "who engage in harmful behaviors" and ways players can report any of this.

Trahan believes solutions start with transparency.

"There are parents now as a result of the ADL report, as a result of these letters and shining a bright light on it, they've got questions," she added.

Trahan told us these letters are just the first step. She hopes hearings on Capitol Hill and possible legislation might also be in the future.

FULL STATEMENT FROM ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE ASSOCIATION:

As an entertainment industry, we strive to create fun and engaging experiences for all players and go to great lengths to ensure that our player communities can be enjoyed in a healthy, safe and inclusive environment. We do not tolerate actions by bad actors seeking to use our games as a platform to propagate inappropriate messages.

The industry has clear codes of conduct that set expectations for acceptable behavior, and players who engage in harmful behaviors, such as hate speech or calls for violence, face serious consequences, including having their accounts terminated and, or, being referred to law enforcement, as warranted. The industry also encourages players to report disruptive content and behavior when they see it, which is one of the most effective tools in curbing bad actors. Advanced technologies, expert human moderators and tools that empower parents and players to manage gameplay also contribute to ensuring safer and more positive experiences for all players.

We are continually evaluating and improving our processes and policies, but what remains unchanged is our goal to create positive, safe and inclusive spaces for everyone.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Kenyan workers behind ChatGPT
SOURCE	https://time.com/6247678/openai-chatgpt-kenya-workers/
GIST	ChatGPT was hailed as one of 2022's most impressive technological innovations upon its release last November. The powerful artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot can generate text on almost any topic or theme, from a Shakespearean sonnet reimagined in the style of Megan Thee Stallion, to complex mathematical theorems described in language a 5 year old can understand. Within a week, it had more than a million users.

ChatGPT's creator, OpenAI, is now reportedly in talks with investors to raise funds at a \$29 billion valuation, including a potential \$10 billion investment by Microsoft. That would make OpenAI, which was founded in San Francisco in 2015 with the aim of building superintelligent machines, one of the world's most valuable AI companies.

But the success story is not one of Silicon Valley genius alone. In its quest to make ChatGPT less toxic, OpenAI used outsourced Kenyan laborers earning less than \$2 per hour, a TIME investigation has found.

The work was vital for OpenAI. ChatGPT's predecessor, GPT-3, had already shown an impressive ability to string sentences together. But it was a difficult sell, as the app was also prone to blurting out violent, sexist and racist remarks. This is because the AI had been trained on hundreds of billions of words scraped from the internet—a vast repository of human language. That huge training dataset was the reason for GPT-3's impressive linguistic capabilities, but was also perhaps its biggest curse. Since parts of the internet are replete with toxicity and bias, there was no easy way of purging those sections of the training data. Even a team of hundreds of humans would have taken decades to trawl through the enormous dataset manually. It was only by building an additional AI-powered safety mechanism that OpenAI would be able to rein in that harm, producing a chatbot suitable for everyday use.

To build that safety system, OpenAI took a leaf out of the playbook of social media companies like Facebook, who had already shown it was possible to build AIs that could detect toxic language like hate speech to help remove it from their platforms. The premise was simple: feed an AI with labeled examples of violence, hate speech, and sexual abuse, and that tool could learn to detect those forms of toxicity in the wild. That detector would be built into ChatGPT to check whether it was echoing the toxicity of its training data, and filter it out before it ever reached the user. It could also help scrub toxic text from the training datasets of future AI models.

To get those labels, OpenAI sent tens of thousands of snippets of text to an outsourcing firm in Kenya, beginning in November 2021. Much of that text appeared to have been pulled from the darkest recesses of the internet. Some of it described situations in graphic detail like child sexual abuse, bestiality, murder, suicide, torture, self harm, and incest.

OpenAI's outsourcing partner in Kenya was Sama, a San Francisco-based firm that employs workers in Kenya, Uganda and India to label data for Silicon Valley clients like Google, Meta and Microsoft. Sama markets itself as an "ethical AI" company and claims to have helped lift more than 50,000 people out of poverty.

The data labelers employed by Sama on behalf of OpenAI were paid a take-home wage of between around \$1.32 and \$2 per hour depending on seniority and performance. For this story, TIME reviewed hundreds of pages of internal Sama and OpenAI documents, including workers' payslips, and interviewed four Sama employees who worked on the project. All the employees spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for their livelihoods.

The story of the workers who made ChatGPT possible offers a glimpse into the conditions in this little-known part of the AI industry, which nevertheless plays an essential role in the effort to make AI systems safe for public consumption. "Despite the foundational role played by these data enrichment professionals, a growing body of research reveals the precarious working conditions these workers face," says the Partnership on AI, a coalition of AI organizations to which OpenAI belongs. "This may be the result of efforts to hide AI's dependence on this large labor force when celebrating the efficiency gains of technology. Out of sight is also out of mind." (OpenAI does not disclose the names of the outsourcers it partners with, and it is not clear whether OpenAI worked with other data labeling firms in addition to Sama on this project.)

In a statement, an OpenAI spokesperson confirmed that Sama employees in Kenya contributed to a tool it was building to detect toxic content, which was eventually built into ChatGPT. The statement also said that this work contributed to efforts to remove toxic data from the training datasets of tools like ChatGPT.

“Our mission is to ensure artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity, and we work hard to build safe and useful AI systems that limit bias and harmful content,” the spokesperson said. “Classifying and filtering harmful [text and images] is a necessary step in minimizing the amount of violent and sexual content included in training data and creating tools that can detect harmful content.”

Even as the wider tech economy slows down amid anticipation of a downturn, investors are racing to pour billions of dollars into “generative AI,” the sector of the tech industry of which OpenAI is the undisputed leader. Computer-generated text, images, video, and audio will transform the way countless industries do business, the most bullish investors believe, boosting efficiency everywhere from the creative arts, to law, to computer programming. But the working conditions of data labelers reveal a darker part of that picture: that for all its glamor, AI often relies on hidden human labor in the Global South that can often be damaging and exploitative. These invisible workers remain on the margins even as their work contributes to billion-dollar industries.

One Sama worker tasked with reading and labeling text for OpenAI told TIME he suffered from recurring visions after reading a graphic description of a man having sex with a dog in the presence of a young child. “That was torture,” he said. “You will read a number of statements like that all through the week. By the time it gets to Friday, you are disturbed from thinking through that picture.” The work’s traumatic nature eventually led Sama to cancel all its work for OpenAI in February 2022, eight months earlier than planned.

The Sama contracts

Documents reviewed by TIME show that OpenAI signed three contracts worth about \$200,000 in total with Sama in late 2021 to label textual descriptions of sexual abuse, hate speech, and violence. Around three dozen workers were split into three teams, one focusing on each subject. Three employees told TIME they were expected to read and label between 150 and 250 passages of text per nine-hour shift. Those snippets could range from around 100 words to well over 1,000. All of the four employees interviewed by TIME described being mentally scarred by the work. Although they were entitled to attend sessions with “wellness” counselors, all four said these sessions were unhelpful and rare due to high demands to be more productive at work. Two said they were only given the option to attend group sessions, and one said their requests to see counselors on a one-to-one basis instead were repeatedly denied by Sama management.

In a statement, a Sama spokesperson said it was “incorrect” that employees only had access to group sessions. Employees were entitled to both individual and group sessions with “professionally-trained and licensed mental health therapists,” the spokesperson said. These therapists were accessible at any time, the spokesperson added.

The contracts stated that OpenAI would pay an hourly rate of \$12.50 to Sama for the work, which was between six and nine times the amount Sama employees on the project were taking home per hour. Agents, the most junior data labelers who made up the majority of the three teams, were paid a basic salary of 21,000 Kenyan shillings (\$170) per month, according to three Sama employees. They also received monthly bonuses worth around \$70 due to the explicit nature of their work, and would receive commission for meeting key performance indicators like accuracy and speed. An agent working nine-hour shifts could expect to take home a total of at least \$1.32 per hour after tax, rising to as high as \$1.44 per hour if they exceeded all their targets. Quality analysts—more senior labelers whose job was to check the work of agents—could take home up to \$2 per hour if they met all their targets. (There is no universal minimum wage in Kenya, but at the time these workers were employed the minimum wage for a receptionist in Nairobi was \$1.52 per hour.)

In a statement, a Sama spokesperson said workers were asked to label 70 text passages per nine hour shift, not up to 250, and that workers could earn between \$1.46 and \$3.74 per hour after taxes. The spokesperson declined to say what job roles would earn salaries toward the top of that range. “The \$12.50 rate for the project covers all costs, like infrastructure expenses, and salary and benefits for the associates and their fully-dedicated quality assurance analysts and team leaders,” the spokesperson added.

An OpenAI spokesperson said in a statement that the company did not issue any productivity targets, and that Sama was responsible for managing the payment and mental health provisions for employees. The

spokesperson added: “we take the mental health of our employees and those of our contractors very seriously. Our previous understanding was that [at Sama] wellness programs and 1:1 counseling were offered, workers could opt out of any work without penalization, exposure to explicit content would have a limit, and sensitive information would be handled by workers who were specifically trained to do so.”

In the day-to-day work of data labeling in Kenya, sometimes edge cases would pop up that showed the difficulty of teaching a machine to understand nuance. One day in early March last year, a Sama employee was at work reading an explicit story about Batman’s sidekick, Robin, being raped in a villain’s lair. (An online search for the text reveals that it originated from an online erotica site, where it is accompanied by explicit sexual imagery.) The beginning of the story makes clear that the sex is nonconsensual. But later—after a graphically detailed description of penetration—Robin begins to reciprocate. The Sama employee tasked with labeling the text appeared confused by Robin’s ambiguous consent, and asked OpenAI researchers for clarification about how to label the text, according to documents seen by TIME. Should the passage be labeled as sexual violence, she asked, or not? OpenAI’s reply, if it ever came, is not logged in the document; the company declined to comment. The Sama employee did not respond to a request for an interview.

How OpenAI’s relationship with Sama collapsed

In February 2022, Sama and OpenAI’s relationship briefly deepened, only to falter. That month, Sama began pilot work for a separate project for OpenAI: collecting sexual and violent images—some of them illegal under U.S. law—to deliver to OpenAI. The work of labeling images appears to be unrelated to ChatGPT. In a statement, an OpenAI spokesperson did not specify the purpose of the images the company sought from Sama, but said labeling harmful images was “a necessary step” in making its AI tools safer. (OpenAI also builds [image-generation](#) technology.) In February, according to one billing document reviewed by TIME, Sama delivered OpenAI a sample batch of 1,400 images. Some of those images were categorized as “C4”—OpenAI’s internal label denoting child sexual abuse—according to the document.

Also included in the batch were “C3” images (including bestiality, rape, and sexual slavery,) and “V3” images depicting graphic detail of death, violence or serious physical injury, according to the billing document. OpenAI paid Sama a total of \$787.50 for collecting the images, the document shows.

Within weeks, Sama had canceled all its work for OpenAI—eight months earlier than agreed in the contracts. The outsourcing company said in a statement that its agreement to collect images for OpenAI did not include any reference to illegal content, and it was only after the work had begun that OpenAI sent “additional instructions” referring to “some illegal categories.” “The East Africa team raised concerns to our executives right away. Sama immediately ended the image classification pilot and gave notice that we would cancel all remaining [projects] with OpenAI,” a Sama spokesperson said. “The individuals working with the client did not vet the request through the proper channels. After a review of the situation, individuals were terminated and new sales vetting policies and guardrails were put in place.”

In a statement, OpenAI confirmed that it had received 1,400 images from Sama that “included, but were not limited to, C4, C3, C2, V3, V2, and V1 images.” In a followup statement, the company said: “We engaged Sama as part of our ongoing work to create safer AI systems and prevent harmful outputs. We never intended for any content in the C4 category to be collected. This content is not needed as an input to our pretraining filters and we instruct our employees to actively avoid it. As soon as Sama told us they had attempted to collect content in this category, we clarified that there had been a miscommunication and that we didn’t want that content. And after realizing that there had been a miscommunication, we did not open or view the content in question — so we cannot confirm if it contained images in the C4 category.”

Sama’s decision to end its work with OpenAI meant Sama employees no longer had to deal with disturbing text and imagery, but it also had a big impact on their livelihoods. Sama workers say that in late February 2022 they were called into a meeting with members of the company’s human resources team, where they were told the news. “We were told that they [Sama] didn’t want to expose their employees to such [dangerous] content again,” one Sama employee on the text-labeling projects said. “We replied that for us, it was a way to provide for our families.” Most of the roughly three dozen workers were moved onto other lower-paying workstreams without the \$70 explicit content bonus per month; others lost their

jobs. Sama delivered its last batch of labeled data to OpenAI in March, eight months before the contract was due to end.

Because the contracts were canceled early, both OpenAI and Sama said the \$200,000 they had previously agreed was not paid in full. OpenAI said the contracts were worth “about \$150,000 over the course of the partnership.”

Sama employees say they were given another reason for the cancellation of the contracts by their managers. On Feb. 14, TIME published a story titled [Inside Facebook’s African Sweatshop](#). The investigation detailed how Sama employed content moderators for Facebook, whose jobs involved viewing images and videos of executions, rape and child abuse for as little as \$1.50 per hour. Four Sama employees said they were told the investigation prompted the company’s decision to end its work for OpenAI. (Facebook says it requires its outsourcing partners to “provide industry-leading pay, benefits and support.”)

Internal communications from after the Facebook story was published, reviewed by TIME, show Sama executives in San Francisco scrambling to deal with the PR fallout, including obliging one company, a subsidiary of Lufthansa, that wanted evidence of its business relationship with Sama scrubbed from the outsourcing firm’s website. In a statement to TIME, Lufthansa confirmed that this occurred, and added that its subsidiary zeroG subsequently terminated its business with Sama. On Feb. 17, three days after TIME’s investigation was published, Sama CEO Wendy Gonzalez sent a message to a group of senior executives via Slack: “We are going to be winding down the OpenAI work.”

On Jan. 10 of this year, Sama went a step further, announcing it was canceling all the rest of its work with sensitive content. The firm said it would not renew its [\\$3.9 million](#) content moderation contract with Facebook, resulting in the loss of some 200 jobs in Nairobi. “After numerous discussions with our global team, Sama made the strategic decision to exit all [natural language processing] and content moderation work to focus on computer vision data annotation solutions,” the company said in a statement. “We have spent the past year working with clients to transition those engagements, and the exit will be complete as of March 2023.”

But the need for humans to label data for AI systems remains, at least for now. “They’re impressive, but ChatGPT and other generative models are not magic – they rely on massive supply chains of human labor and scraped data, much of which is unattributed and used without consent,” Andrew Strait, an AI ethicist, recently wrote on Twitter. “These are serious, foundational problems that I do not see OpenAI addressing.”

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HEADLINE	01/18 Critical infrastructure default passwords
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/industrial-system-cybersecurity-default-passwords/
GIST	<p>Easily guessed default passwords can be a malicious hackers’ easiest way to infiltrate a target. And all too often, according to research released Wednesday, operators of critical infrastructure companies aren’t updating off-the-shelf security credentials in internet devices connected to industrial systems.</p> <p>“We’re seeing a lot of the ‘admin1234,’ meaning that [hackers are] still going to be using default credentials in hopes that no one is changing the credentials for IoT devices — which is pretty accurate,” said Roya Gordon, security research evangelist at Nozomi Networks, a cybersecurity firm that specializes in industrial security.</p> <p>The lack of the most basic security precaution is especially alarming in critical infrastructure. These organizations operate chemical plants, pipelines, utilities, hospitals and other industries that support essential functions of daily life.</p> <p>Critical infrastructure cybersecurity has become such a concern in the U.S. that the Biden administration has made it a top national security priority. The White House is expected to release an updated national</p>

[cybersecurity strategy](#) in the coming weeks and the administration is likely to call for mandatory cybersecurity rules for particularly vulnerable industries, according to The Washington Post.

While much of the critical infrastructure that is owned and operated by the private sector is not heavily regulated for cybersecurity, calls for tougher mandates have grown in recent years following digital assaults such as the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack.

The administration has taken some additional measures recently, as well. Late last year, the Transportation Security Administration released cybersecurity requirements for the rail and transit sectors. The mandates are in addition to the security directives for the pipeline industry after Colonial Pipeline.

Gordon expects that internet-connect devices will grow quickly inside industrial companies especially with the rise of digitization such as critical manufacturing. “Integrating IoT in manufacturing environments, smart manufacturing, smart buildings: that just means more vulnerable devices,” she said.

The Nozomi report examined industrial control system threat landscape over the past six months and based its research on the types of attacks on the company’s honeypots. The company also noted that the growing threat facing critical infrastructure is a global problem given the last year’s spree of wiper malware attacks designed to erase hard drives.

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war, researchers have identified [at least 10 new types](#) of wiper malware targeting Ukrainian organizations. Researchers and officials attributed many of those attacks to Russia.

Additionally, Nozomi pointed to an [attack last year](#) by the Iranian hacktivist group Gonjeshke Darandethat, also known as Predatory Sparrow. The group appears to have launched a series of intrusions that used wiper malware against critical infrastructure.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Ransomware attacks persist in healthcare
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/ransomware-attacks-persist-in-healthcare-as-impacts-on-patient-safety-rise
GIST	<p>Patient safety has become the driving force behind ongoing healthcare cybersecurity risk framing and as a risk metric for evaluating connected vendors. While reporting gaps limit precise calculations of those impacts, stakeholders are actively working to change that.</p> <p>Two new reports spotlight ongoing challenges facing healthcare through a patient safety lens, both in retrospect and in the year ahead: Fortified Health Security’s 2023 Horizon Report and Ponemon Institute report on the impact of ransomware on patient safety.</p> <p>The Ponemon report reaffirms that the number of healthcare data breaches didn’t change significantly last year, but the severity of each breach has steadily worsened. SC Media previously reported that more than a dozen of the biggest incidents in 2022 each impacted well over 1 million records. The vast majority of these were attributed to hacking and IT incidents.</p> <p>As noted by CEO Dan L. Dodson, the Fortified Health report stressed that healthcare’s risk of targeting by threat actors mirrors other sectors. But the impacts in the industry far outpace the risks facing other industries: “The inability, or limited ability, to care for patients because of a security incident pales in comparison to a small charge on a credit card, easily reversed once identified.”</p> <p>“Unlike credit card fraud, patient access to healthcare isn’t something you can easily walk back,” Dodson wrote.</p> <p>As the latest Ponemon Institute survey shows, the impact of ransomware attacks on patient care has remained one of the biggest risks and challenges facing the sector. Overall, the sector faced a number of</p>

ransomware attacks last year, many of which were caused by poor cybersecurity controls both internally and with their third-party vendors and products.

Nearly half of the respondents experienced a ransomware attack in the last two years, and 93% faced between one to five ransomware-related incidents. The outages spurred from these attacks have not improved and can last upwards of 35 days.

Of those entities that faced a ransomware incident, half of the attacks were caused by a third party. The data reaffirms ongoing reports on the continued [vendor challenges plaguing the sector](#).

More than half of ransomware victims reported that the attacks led to disruptions in patient care, which were tied to complications with medical procedures. The biggest impact reported was an increase in the likelihood of reverting to care diversion after an attack.

During a [2021 House Energy & Commerce hearing](#), Christian Dameff, an emergency room physician at the University of California San Diego, testified that ransomware attacks not only disrupt patient care at the targeted site: neighboring hospitals face care disruptions due to the overflow of unexpected patients diverted from those impacted care sites.

The widespread outages at [CommonSpirit Health last year](#) led to similar results.

The report also showed nearly a quarter of respondents believe ransomware also adversely affects patient mortality rates. As [demonstrated in a study published recently in JAMA](#), reporting gaps have led to missing data to solidly confirm mortality impacts after a ransomware attack.

But a lawsuit filed in 2021 alleges that a baby died in an Alabama hospital that was operating under downtime procedures after a ransomware attack, as the tech needed to detect the baby's distress was offline. The case garnered national headlines and confirmed the need for greater [insight into care morbidity impacts](#).

While the sector gained momentum in several positive ways last year in [terms of proposed policies](#) and new FDA authorities for medical device security, healthcare leaders should not wait for federal action to address these possible gaps to reduce the risk of care disruptions in the event of an inevitable attack.

Benchmarking and other possible remedies for cyber risk

SC Media recently spoke with several leading healthcare security leaders at the launch of [the Health3PT initiative](#), which aims to address these ongoing resource challenges especially around third parties. The consensus is that it's imperative to move the industry to a much higher level of competence and ensure connected partners are meeting security requirements.

"As technologies change, as our business needs change," John Houston, UPMC CISO previously told SC Media. Working with vendors and other business partners with verified mature security programs in place can give organizations the confidence needed in working relationships.

Ponemon's report reflected on the role of benchmarking in addressing these challenges. Cybersecurity peer benchmarking is defined as the comparison of an entity's security performance and maturity against similar delivery organizations across key security program costs, productivity, and operational metrics and coverage of industry recognized security practices, such as NIST Cybersecurity Framework.

The model provides valuable insights into how healthcare resources should be allocated to reduce the risk of ransomware and its potential impacts on patient care.

Benchmarking was also ranked as important to making the business case for hiring cyber staff and investing in technologies to the board and for demonstrating cybersecurity framework coverage and compliance, improving cybersecurity programs, and decision making.

	<p>Sixty percent of respondents to the Ponemon report said they felt that benchmarks were valuable to understanding just how much of their budgets should be allocated to their cybersecurity programs by demonstrating cybersecurity program effectiveness.</p> <p>However, about half of the respondents reported that “issues with data discourage organizations from benchmarking their cybersecurity programs.” In fact, 57% report not benchmarking their cybersecurity programs against their peers for data-related reasons.</p> <p>Lastly, the report confirmed the importance of having policies and practices in place to proactively assess third-party risk, remediate identified security gaps, and quickly respond to and recover from a third party-driven ransomware attack.</p> <p>For Fortified Health Security, healthcare organizations “must get granular with cybersecurity precautions if they want to stem the tide of breaches” in the coming year. That means focusing on the basics: strong passwords, multi-factor authentication (MFA), vulnerability management, frequent patching, and managing human risk through continuous workforce training.</p> <p>The reports reaffirm that the threats facing healthcare have remained consistent, serving to heighten possible care disruptions in the wake of an incident. Transparency is needed, as well as willing investments into identifying pain points and strengthening processes where possible.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Internet censorship 2022: 4B impacted
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/four-billion-people-internet/
GIST	<p>Internet shutdowns affected a total of 4.2 billion people in 2022, with individuals experiencing 112 internet restrictions across 32 countries throughout the year. Thirty-four of these cases started before 2022, while 78 began during 2022.</p> <p>The new data comes from a report that VPN provider Surfshark shared with <i>Infosecurity</i> ahead of publication.</p> <p>“Authoritarian governments have turned to internet and social media disruptions to maintain their rule and curb civil unrest, opposing political parties, free speech, and looming socio-economic concerns,” reads the report.</p> <p>According to the new data, the average duration of an internet connection disruption was 33 hours, and the average time of social media censorship was 114 days.</p> <p>“Of the multiple high-profile internet censorship events in 2022, four regions stand out above all others,” Surfshark wrote. “Russia, India, Iran, and the Jammu and Kashmir region gained international media coverage for frequent internet and social media disruptions.”</p> <p>In terms of social platforms most targeted by authoritarian governments, Facebook was at the top of the list in 2022, followed by Instagram and TikTok.</p> <p>The latter social media is reportedly being restricted by an increasing number of authoritarian countries, including Azerbaijan, Armenia and Jordan.</p> <p>“While we all know that internet censorship carries a variety of damaging and dangerous consequences,” concluded the report, “it’s the attack on people’s opportunities for growth, knowledge, freedom, and democracy that makes the issue vital and well worth speaking about.”</p> <p>The Surfshark’s internet censorship yearly recap is now available at this link. It was compiled by the company using data from digital rights non-government organizations (NGOs) NetBlocks, AccessNow and Freedom House and news sources such as BBC, Bloomberg and The New York Times. Surfshark has also</p>

	<p>said the research included data from Facebook, IODA, Google, Worldometer and Internet Shutdowns SFLC.in.</p> <p>The report comes two weeks after WhatsApp introduced proxy support to tackle internet disruption tactics used by repressive governments.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Chinese APT group targets Iran govt.
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/chinese-apt-group-vixen-panda/
GIST	<p>The Chinese advanced persistent threat (APT) known as Vixen Panda has been linked to a new series of attacks targeting the Iranian government between July and December 2022.</p> <p>The claims come from cybersecurity researchers at Palo Alto Networks' Unit 42, who shared a report about them with <i>Infosecurity</i> via email.</p> <p>Called "Playful Taurus" by Unit 42, Vixen Panda is also known as APT15, BackdoorDiplomacy, KeChang and NICKEL. The threat actor has been active since at least 2010, often targeting government and diplomatic entities in North and South America, Africa and the Middle East.</p> <p>"In June 2021, ESET reported that this group had upgraded their tool kit to include a new backdoor called Turian," wrote Unit 42 in the advisory published earlier today.</p> <p>"This backdoor remains under active development, and we assess that it is used exclusively by Playful Taurus actors. Following the evolution of this capability, we recently identified new variants of this backdoor as well as new command and control infrastructure."</p> <p>Both variants, which featured additional obfuscation and a modified network protocol, were deployed in attacks against several Iranian government networks.</p> <p>"We identified Iranian government infrastructure establishing connections with a known Playful Taurus command and control (C2) server," wrote Unit 42. "Pivoting on one of the Iranian government IPs, we then identified additional infrastructure hosting certificates that overlap with a second Playful Taurus C2 server."</p> <p>According to Palo Alto Networks, the upgrades to the Turian backdoor and new C2 infrastructure suggest that Vixen Panda continues to see success during its cyber-espionage campaigns.</p> <p>In the advisory, which is available here, the company has also shared file samples and indicators of compromise (IoC) of the new malicious campaign alongside various protection and mitigation suggestions.</p> <p>These include the use of advanced URL filtering and DNS security practices to identify domains associated with Playful Taurus as malicious.</p> <p>The Unit 42 advisory comes days after new data from Recorded Future suggested that restrictive laws in China may push cyber-criminals toward new monetization techniques.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Illegal Solaris darknet market hijacked
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/illegal-solaris-darknet-market-hijacked-by-competitor-kraken/
GIST	<p>Solaris, a large darknet marketplace focused on drugs and illegal substances, has been taken over by a smaller competitor named 'Kraken,' who claims to have hacked it on January 13, 2022.</p>

The Tor site of Solaris currently redirects to Kraken, while blockchain monitoring experts at Elliptic report no movements in the cryptocurrency addresses associated with the site after January 13, 2022.

The Solaris marketplace emerged a few months ago, following the seizure of Hydra, attempting to capture a portion of the then-disturbed market. The new market quickly captured about 25% of the market and processed roughly \$150,000,000 in illegal sales.

At the start of the year, a Resecurity report on the emergence of novel drug markets claimed that Solaris had received 60,000 new registrations since Hydra's sudden demise, while Kraken only absorbed about 10% of that.

Taking down competitors

Solaris was a Russian-speaking platform reportedly affiliated with Killnet, a pro-Kremlin hacktivist group that launched several DDoS attacks against organizations in the western world in 2022.

Elliptic has traced several donations from Solaris to Killnet, amounting to more than \$44,000 worth of Bitcoin. The DDoS group presumably used this money to purchase more firepower for launching disruptive attacks.

In December 2022, Ukrainian cyber-intelligence analyst Alex Holden claimed to have breached Solaris and stolen \$25,000, which was donated to a humanitarian charity in Ukraine.

While Solaris disputed the claims about the hack and called out the lack of evidence, Holden later released more details and leaked source code and databases allegedly associated with the marketplace.

On Friday, January 13, 2023, Kraken announced they had taken over Solaris' infrastructure, GitLab repository, and all project sources, thanks to "several huge bugs in the code."

Kraken's statement claims that it took them three days to steal the clear text passwords and keys stored in Solaris' servers, access its infrastructure located in Finland, and then download everything without anyone stopping them.

Finally, the attackers said they disabled Solaris' Bitcoin server, which aligns with Elliptic's observations in the blockchain.

"The project has several huge bugs in the code, which to this day remain relevant, you can turn over and over again. Also, storing passwords and keys from your servers in clear text is an even bigger mistake, the lot of schoolchildren from the 5th desk," claims a note on the Kraken marketplace seen by Elliptic.

"This event took us 3 days in a calm mode and we downloaded absolutely EVERYTHING that is supposed to be in such cases (and no one stopped us). PS We deliberately disabled the bitcoin server so that no one steals anything, but probably in vain)."

"Everything that is written above is a response to aggression in our direction in the amount of x10, we warned. The same applies to others."

At this time, neither Killnet nor anyone from the Solaris core team has issued any announcement about the platform's status and the validity of Kraken's claims.

Kraken is also pro-Kremlin, so the motives of the hack are unlikely to be political.

Instead, they appear to be fueled by market interests, as taking over a competitor and redirecting their members to your platform is undoubtedly an effective way to achieve growth while also planting concern about the security of the breached market.

HEADLINE	01/18 Ukraine: data-wiping attack Russia hackers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ukraine-links-data-wiping-attack-on-news-agency-to-russian-hackers/
GIST	<p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) has linked a destructive malware attack targeting the country's national news agency (Ukrinform) to Sandworm Russian military hackers.</p> <p>"According to preliminary data, provided by CERT-UA specialists, the attack have caused certain destructive effects on the agency's information infrastructure, but the threat has been swiftly localized nonetheless," the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP) of Ukraine said.</p> <p>"This enabled Ukrinform to continue its operation. Right now, CERT-UA specialists are assisting in infrastructure recovery and continuing investigation of the incident."</p> <p>CERT-U says the cyberattack was likely carried out by the Sandworm group based on the threat actors' tactics, which was previously linked to the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GRU).</p> <p>The attackers launched the CaddyWiper malware on the news agency's systems using a Windows group policy (GPO), showing that they had breached the target's network beforehand. Still, they failed to impact the news agency's operations.</p> <p>"Russians have been trying to cut off Ukrainians from the information on the current situation and the course of the war since the early days of the full-scale invasion," SSSCIP Head Yuri Shchyhol said on Wednesday.</p> <p>"They have shut off Ukrainian TV, the Internet and mobile communication in the territories, temporarily controlled by the enemy, and they have been striking TV and radio transmitting towers in multiple cities of Ukraine with their missiles. They have waged cyberattacks on Ukrainian media."</p> <p>Sandworm also used the CaddyWiper destructive malware in another failed attack from April 2022 against a large Ukrainian energy provider.</p> <p>The attackers tried to erase traces left by Industroyer ICS malware with the help of CaddyWiper, and other data wipers designed for Linux and Solaris systems tracked as Orcshred, Soloshred, and Awfulshred.</p> <p>CaddyWiper was first discovered by ESET security researchers in March 2022 when the data-destroying malware was used to delete data across the Windows domains of multiple Ukrainian organizations.</p> <p>Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, security researchers have discovered a series of data-wiping malware deployed against Ukrainian targets besides CaddyWiper, including DoubleZero, HermeticWiper, IsaacWiper, WhisperKill, WhisperGate, and AcidRain. Recent ransomware attacks against Ukraine have also been linked to the Sandworm Russian-backed threat group.</p> <p>Microsoft also revealed in November that Sandworm was behind Prestige ransomware attacks that have targeted the supply chain by attacking logistics and transportation companies in Ukraine and Poland starting in October 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 BoA restoring missing Zelle transactions
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/bank-of-america-starts-restoring-missing-zelle-transactions/
GIST	Bank of America has started to restore missing Zelle transactions that suddenly disappeared from customers' bank accounts this morning, causing some to dip into negative balances.

The outage began at approximately 7 AM ET today, with BoA customers suddenly finding their account balances had decreased after recent Zelle transactions disappeared.

This led to reports on [DownDetector](#), [Reddit](#), and Twitter from hundreds of customers missing their Zelle transactions.

Soon after, Bank of America posted pushed an alert through their banking app warning customers that they were working on restoring the missing Zelle transactions.

"Zelle transactions made between January 14 and January 17 may be delayed in occurring and posting to accounts as requested," the BoA banking alert reads

"Transfers will be completed and will appear in your account activity and balances as soon as possible. We apologize for any delay or inconvenience."

Bank of America customers have been angrily voicing their concerns about the missing transactions, with some reporting that it caused them to dip into negative balances.

"Yeah I'm negative right now, all transfers from this week are gone. Haven't been able to get through to customer service all morning. This might be the final straw with BofA, I'll be switching banks," an angry BoA customer [posted to Reddit](#).

"Help this issue with zelle is extremely frustrating, especially since you've said nothing formally about what's going on. What do I do with this negative balance? How should I pay my bills due today? Get gas? Anything ??," another BoA customer commented [on Twitter](#).

Customers have said that Bank of America has started to restore some of the missing transactions.

However, the restoration of Zelle transactions is rolling out slowly, with users stating that they have seen some missing transactions restored but not all of them.

New affordable clean energy plan continues to be an economic boon for United States. Estimates show it will create nearly 10 million jobs.

BleepingComputer contacted Bank of America with questions about the outage but has yet to receive a reply.

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HEADLINE	01/18 MailChimp discloses new breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/mailchimp-discloses-new-breach-after-employees-got-hacked/
GIST	<p>Email marketing firm MailChimp suffered another breach after hackers accessed an internal customer support and account administration tool, allowing the threat actors to access the data of 133 customers.</p> <p>MailChimp says the attackers gained access to employee credentials after conducting a social engineering attack on Mailchimp employees and contractors.</p> <p>The attack was first detected on January 11th, after MailChimp detected the unauthorized person accessing their support tools.</p> <p>"After we identified evidence of an unauthorized actor, we temporarily suspended account access for Mailchimp accounts where we detected suspicious activity to protect our users' data," reads a statement about the security incident.</p>

"We notified the primary contacts for all affected accounts on January 12, less than 24 hours after initial discovery."

In response to our questions about the breach, MailChimp shared the following statement.

"While we do not share customer information as a matter of course, we can share that no credit card or password information was compromised as a result of this incident," MailChimp told BleepingComputer.

"Our investigation into the matter is ongoing, and includes identifying measures to further protect our platform. For operational security reasons we are not publicly commenting on actions we are taking. - MailChimp.

As first reported by [TechCrunch](#), one of the customers affected by this breach is the massively popular WooCommerce eCommerce plugin for WordPress.

WooCommerce has emailed customers warning them that the MailChimp breach exposed their names, store URLs, addresses, and email addresses.

While WooCommerce states that there is no indication that the stolen data has been misused, threat actors commonly use this type of data for targeted phishing attacks to steal credentials or install malware.

In April 2022, Trezor hardware wallet owners began receiving [fake data breach notifications](#) prompting customers to download a fake Trezor Suite software that would steal their recovery seeds.

Fake Trezor data breach notification

Trezor [said on Twitter](#) that the mailing list used in this phishing campaign was a Trezor mailing list stolen in a breach on MailChimp.

MailChimp later [confirmed that the breach was more extensive](#), with employees falling for a social engineering attack that allowed threat actors to access 319 MailChimp accounts and export the data from 102 customers.

The marketing company confirmed that this data was being used in phishing emails but declined to share more information about the attacks.

In August 2022, MailChimp was again breached after employees [fell for an Okta phishing attack](#) dubbed 'Oktapus.'

MailChimp told BleepingComputer at the time that the [threat actors accessed 214 MailChimp accounts](#), focusing on cryptocurrency-related customers.

Customers affected in the August breach included Edge Wallet, Cointelegraph, NFT creators, Ethereum FESP, and Messari and Decrypt.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Microsoft: Windows Start Menu bugs
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/microsoft/microsoft-investigates-bug-behind-unresponsive-windows-start-menu/
GIST	<p>Microsoft is investigating an issue causing the Windows taskbar and Start Menu to become unresponsive and triggering Outlook and Teams login problems.</p> <p>Windows admins have told BleepingComputer that their users have been reporting issues not seeing the Windows Start Menu when clicking, not being able to launch modern apps, and that the Windows Search feature is broken.</p>

Others have also reported encountering issues while trying to log into Azure Active Directory (Azure AD) to activate Office 365 apps.

Similar issues have happened in the past, too, with Microsoft MVP Rudy Ooms [linking](#) them in June 2022 with the ClickShare app (a tool that helps share a Windows device's screen wirelessly) corrupting User Shell Folders registry permissions.

However, Microsoft sent a statement two months later acknowledging that its own software was breaking permissions for the affected apps and causing unresponsiveness and connection issues.

"While this initially appeared to be an issue with the 3rd party app, it now appears to be Microsoft code (profapi.dll) which breaks the permissions thinking they need to be recovered," Redmonds told Ooms.

"This may occur when an x32 third-party process (like ClickShare) uses Office APIs on a machine where Office is deployed using Office ClickToRun, because of a bug in AppvIsvSubsystem32.dll registry hooks.

"In this case, profapi.dll will start recovering the ACLs, but after a second failure, it won't write the All Application Packages ACLs, causing issues (crashes & registration failures) with packaged apps."

Script to fix corrupt registry permissions

Today, Barco (ClickShare's developer) has updated an advisory it initially issued in July 2022 to share a helper Diagnostic PowerShell script provided by Microsoft Support that would allow affected users to repair the corrupted User Shell Folders registry permissions.

"Although the app is not causing the problem, we still want to offer our ClickShare App users a possible intermediate solution," [Barco said](#).

"In most cases it has been possible to recover by using the recovery tool from Microsoft: the recovery tool FixUserShellFolderPermissions."

The script can be downloaded from the [Downloads section](#) at the end of Barco's recently updated advisory. If the issue is not addressed after running the helper script, you should manually disable the Calendar Integration feature from ClickShare's Settings dialog.

"Please contact Barco Support for more details on an dedicated APP version (4.25.2) to prevent the issue from happening until a final solution can be offered," the company added.

Issue under investigation

While Microsoft is yet to acknowledge this issue publicly, Barco said that Redmond's Windows team is investigating it and advises affected customers to reach out to Microsoft to file a report of their own.

"The issue is under investigation with Microsoft Windows team but it still is good to take up contact directly with Microsoft Windows team to flag this issue," Barco said.

"Make sure to mention for ticket submission the title "unresponsive start menu or task bar" and refer to Microsoft internal bug number: 41322218."

A Microsoft spokesperson was not immediately available for comment when contacted by BleepingComputer earlier today.

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HEADLINE	01/18 New motives, tactics, malware confront ICS
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/ics-ot/ics-confronted-by-attackers-armed-with-new-motives-tactics-and-malware

The motive of financial and political gain — fueled partially by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine — has emboldened threat actors to barrage industrial control systems (ICS) with ever more disruptive cyberattacks, diversifying the threat landscape for critical infrastructure, new research shows.

This trend is expected to continue throughout 2023 with attackers arming themselves with new tactics and malware, forcing ICS operators to level up if they want to protect their networks, according to Nozomi Networks' "OT/IoT Security Report: A Deep Look Into the ICS Threat Landscape" for the second half of 2022, [published Jan. 18](#).

It used to be that nation-state actors were the leading perpetrators of attacks against ICS, primarily using remote access Trojans (RATs) to drop malware payloads and gain remote access to networks, as well as mounting distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks to cause "inconvenient" disruption, says Roya Gordon, security research evangelist at Nozomi Networks. "Historically, critical infrastructure disruptions were seen as a nation-state tactic," she says.

However, the now-infamous [Colonial Pipeline](#) attack in May 2021 [marked a significant shift](#) in this trend. In that incident, a ransomware attack that started with a stolen password caused panic and gas shortages across the eastern United States, and attackers realized how disruptive and potentially lucrative new attack vectors could be, she says.

"The [Colonial Pipeline](#) attack demonstrated how cybercriminals can leverage ransomware attacks on critical infrastructure — since they tend to depend heavily on real-time data, and have the means to meet ransom demands — for financial gain," Gordon notes.

Then with Russia's attack on Ukraine last February, attacks on ICS got political, with hacktivists, traditionally known for data breaches and DDoS attacks, wielding destructive [wiper malware](#) to disrupt transportation systems such as railroads and other critical infrastructure in the Ukraine for political gain, she says.

This marked a shift in not only who was attacking ICS, but how and for what motive they were launching these attacks, Gordon says. "All in all, this unprecedented level of activity across all fronts should cause us concern."

Top ICS Cyberattack Trends

The report identified top trends in the ICS threat landscape based on a compilation of information from various sources including open source media, CISA ICS-CERT advisories, and Nozomi Networks telemetry, as well as on exclusive IoT honeypots that Nozomi researchers employ for "a deeper insight into how adversaries are targeting OT and IoT, furthering the understanding of malicious botnets that attempt to access these systems," Gordon says.

What researchers observed over the last six months was a significant uptick in attacks that caused disruption to a number of industries, with transportation and healthcare being among the top new sectors finding themselves in the crosshairs of adversaries among more traditional targets.

Attackers are using various methods of initial entry to ICS networks, although some common weak security links that have historically plagued not just ICS but the entire enterprise IT sector — weak/cleartext passwords and weak encryption — continue to be the top access threats.

Still, "Root" and "admin" credentials are most often used as a way for threat actors to gain initial access and escalate privileges once in the network, the findings show. Other ways threat actors find their way in include brute-force attacks and DDoS attempts.

In terms of malware, [RATs](#) remain the most common malware detected against ICS, while DDoS malware and unusually high and still-rising IoT botnet activity continued to be the top threat for IoT devices on a network. The use of default credentials to hack IoT devices was the primary means of entry for IoT botnets, the researchers found.

Over the second half of last year, attacks on ICS spiked in July, October, and December, with more than 5,000 unique attacks in each of those months. [Manufacturing](#) and energy remained the most vulnerable industries, followed by water/wastewater, healthcare, and transportation systems.

Interestingly, despite the uptick in targeting Ukraine, the top attacker IP addresses observed in the second half of 2023 didn't come from Russia nor countries that side with Russia, the researchers found. Instead, the main IP addresses associated with ICS attacks were in China, the US, South Korea, and Taiwan, according to Nozomi's data.

The Look Ahead

Top among ICS/IoT threats to watch out for: adversaries will use hybrid threat tactics that don't follow what operators may have seen in the past, which means "it will become increasingly difficult to categorize types of threat actors based on TTPs and motives," according to the report.

Organizations in the healthcare sector — which saw [a spike in attacks](#) when COVID-19 hit that has continued even as the pandemic largely wanes — should be mindful to stay on top of medical-device updates, according to Nozomi. Threat actors will likely use exploits to access medical systems that aggregate device data, a manipulation that can have dire and even life-threatening consequences for patients, potentially leading to malfunctions, misreadings, or even overdoses in automatic release of medication.

Another new threat on the horizon is from AI-driven chatbots that attackers will use for malicious purposes, such as writing code or developing exploits for vulnerabilities. They also can use them to generate more accurate phishing/social engineering texts that can be used as entry access to ICS networks, the researchers said.

"All this could reduce the time it takes to develop targeted threat campaigns, thus increasing the frequency of cyberattacks," according to the report.

Though the news appears gloomy, securing ICS against oncoming threats can be as simple as practicing "basic cyber hygiene," employing typical IT security practices that any organization already should be using, Gordon says.

"While threat actors may have the capability to access OT and IoT directly, it's one of their long-standing strategies to first breach IT and pivot into OT," she says. "Therefore, taking steps to secure IT is key."

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HEADLINE	01/18 Ransomware attack impacts 1,000 ships
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/ransomware-attack-dnv-ship-management-software-impacts-1000-vessels
GIST	<p>Norway-based industrial risk management and assurance solutions provider DNV said a recent ransomware attack on its ship management software impacted 1,000 vessels.</p> <p>DNV revealed on January 9 that its ShipManager software was targeted in a cyberattack on January 7, which forced the company to shut down associated servers.</p> <p>In an update shared on January 17, the company clarified that it was targeted in a ransomware attack that impacted 70 of its customers and roughly 1,000 vessels.</p> <p>“There are no indications that any other software or data by DNV is affected. The server outage does not impact any other DNV services,” DNV said in a press release.</p> <p>It’s unclear which ransomware group is behind the attack and whether any data has been stolen. SecurityWeek has checked the websites of several major groups, but found no mention of DNV. However, threat actors typically name victims and threaten to leak stolen data only after initial negotiations have failed.</p>

	<p>DNV provides a wide range of services for the maritime, power, oil and gas, automotive and aerospace, food and beverage, and the healthcare industries. The company's ShipManager software for the maritime industry is designed for ship management operations and ship design.</p> <p>DNV says on its website that 300 shipping companies worldwide use its maritime software for more than 6,000 vessels.</p> <p>SecurityWeek talked to several experts last year about cybersecurity in the maritime industry, including attack vectors, the potential effects of maritime supply chain damage, threat scenarios, attacker motivations, and what the industry should do to address existing problems.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Ukraine: cyberattacks tripled in past year
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/19/cyber-attacks-have-tripled-in-past-year-says-ukraine-cybersecurity-agency
GIST	<p>Ukraine has suffered a threefold growth in cyber-attacks over the past year, with Russian hacking at times deployed in combination with missile strikes, according to a senior figure in the country's cybersecurity agency.</p> <p>The attacks from Russia have often taken the form of destructive, disk-erasing wiper malware, said Viktor Zhora, a leading figure in the country's SSSCIP agency, with "in some cases, cyber-attacks supportive to kinetic effects".</p> <p>Zhora's comments came as he visited London's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), a part of GCHQ, where he and Ukrainian colleagues were due to discuss how to work together to tackle the Russian threat.</p> <p>Welcoming them, Tom Tugendhat, the UK security minister, said the fight "against Russian barbarism goes beyond the battlefield" and terror inflicted on civilians. "There is the real and persistent threat of a Russian cyber-attack on Ukraine's critical infrastructure," he added.</p> <p>A day earlier, SSSCIP released an analysis of Russia's cyberstrategy during the war so far, which concluded that cyber-attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure last autumn were linked to its sustained bombing campaign.</p> <p>Russia launched "powerful cyber-attacks to cause a maximum blackout" on 24 November, the report said, in tandem with waves of missile strikes on Ukraine's energy facilities that at the time had forced all the country's nuclear plants offline.</p> <p>Enemy hackers carried out 10 attacks a day against "critical infrastructure" during November, according to Ukraine's SBU domestic spy agency, part of the wider effort to leave millions without power amid plunging temperatures.</p> <p>Cyber-attacks were also coordinated with Russian "information-psychological and propaganda operations", SSSCIP said, aimed at trying to "shift responsibility for the consequences [of power outages] to Ukrainian state authorities, local governments or large Ukrainian businesses".</p> <p>Russian hackers range from highly professional military groups, part of the Kremlin's security complex, through criminal gangs, often seeking to make money, to so called pro-Kremlin "hacktivists".</p> <p>Ukraine appears to have had some success in tackling and containing Russian and pro-Russian hacking since before the start of the war, although Kyiv has been helped by substantial support from the west. The UK has provided a £6.35m package of support, helping with incident response and information sharing, plus hardware and software.</p>

Return to Top	<p>British officials hosting the Ukrainians added there had been no increase in Russian cyber-activity aimed at the west, although some attacks have targeted “Russia’s near abroad”, most notably Poland, which has reported an increase in attacks on government and strategic targets from the autumn.</p> <p>In late October, Poland’s senate was hit by a cyber-attack, a day after the country’s upper house had unanimously adopted a resolution describing the Russian government as a terrorist regime. Poland later blamed the pro-Russian group NoName057(16) for a denial of service attack aimed at shutting down its website.</p> <p>Warsaw has also accused the pro-Russian Ghostwriter group, which its experts believe operates from Belarus and has links to the Kremlin’s GRU military intelligence agency, of being engaged in a disinformation campaign aimed at trying to hack mail addresses and social media accounts of public figures in the country.</p> <p>Britain continues to believe there remains a significant threat to British organisations from the Russian cyberactivity, but it has not obviously stepped up since the start of the war. Nor has there been any sign of Russian wiper malware being targeted against UK organisations.</p> <p>However, UK experts warn there has been “pre-positioning” in case a denial of service or other cyber-attacks are ordered. British organisations are urged to continue to review their digital security during what the NCSC considers to be an “extended period of heightened threat”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 China lunar new year internet crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/19/china-announces-lunar-new-year-censorship-crackdown-to-silence-covid-rumours
GIST	<p>Chinese cyber authorities have announced an internet censorship crackdown to ensure there are no “gloomy sentiments” caused by pandemic “rumours” during the lunar new year festival.</p> <p>It comes as health forecasting firm Airfinity estimated more than 600,000 people have likely died since zero-Covid restrictions were lifted in December – 10 times more than Chinese authorities have officially declared.</p> <p>The month-long “Spring Festival online improvement” program will target those spreading what authorities deem to be “rumours” about the spread of Covid and patient experiences.</p> <p>The national cyber administration specified “in-depth rectification of false information and other issues to prevent gloomy sentiments”.</p> <p>It specifically cited the investigation and punishment of “online rumours related to the epidemic” and “fabricating patient experiences”, as well as producing or sharing fake virus treatments. The announcement said the work would “prevent misleading the public and causing social panic”.</p> <p>Online, social media has been awash with personal stories of people contracting Covid, struggling to source medication or healthcare, and losing elderly relatives to the disease. The personal experiences of many jarred with the official narrative that the outbreak was under control and the response “science led”, prompting unusual levels of online criticism against the government.</p> <p>On Saturday health officials announced an updated death toll of almost 60,000 people. The figure included only those who had died in hospital. Previously, the government had only reported about 5,000 Covid deaths since the pandemic began, including just a few dozen since the zero Covid policy was abandoned in early December. It was at odds with widespread reports of fatalities, with some major cities reporting infection rates of up to 90% of their populations.</p>

The ruling Communist party government is hypersensitive to foreign criticism of its Covid response and accusations that it is not being transparent with data. Early warnings about the outbreak by Chinese doctor Li Wenliang were initially dismissed and punished as rumour. More recent reporting on the mass outbreak following the lifting of restrictions was branded a “China-bashing carnival” in state media.

Health officials have claimed the current wave of infections has peaked, but it followed warnings of further infections spread across lunar new year as hundreds of millions of people travel across the country. People were urged not to visit elderly relatives unless necessary.

On Thursday, independent forecaster Airfinity said their new modelling had raised estimates of case numbers and fatalities in China. It said the number of deaths since December was now estimated at 608,000, up from the previous estimate of 437,000.

The organisation also changed its forecast of two successive infection waves to one, which was “larger and more severe”, bringing as many as 62m new cases over the 14-day holiday period.

“Deaths are forecast to peak at 36,000 a day on the 26th of January during the Lunar New Year Festival. This is up from our previous estimate of deaths peaking at 25,000 a day,” it said.

“The implication of one larger wave as opposed to two smaller ones is increased pressure on hospitals and crematoriums and therefore also potentially a higher case fatality ratio.”

China’s censors have appeared to struggle to control critical social media commentary in the wake of the zero Covid policy reversal. The new program shows a renewed effort to stamp out dissent, and ensure China’s online environment reflects the Party’s image and ideals.

“After all this, they will say you have to be happy, it will be politically incorrect if you are not happy,” said one Chinese Twitter user in response.

“It seems that the best way to solve the problem is to ‘cover your mouth’.” said another. “I can’t say anything but praise.”

The Spring festival program also continues an ongoing crackdown on excessive fan culture and illegal gambling, and targets online glorification of excessive consumption and wealth.

As examples, it cited people deliberately showing off their “luxury life” with excessive dinners, year-end bonuses, large red envelopes of cash (a traditional New Years gift) and expensive gifts.

The administration said it would also “investigate and deal with the deliberate displaying of images of overeating and drinking during the Spring Festival, and promoting extravagant and wasteful information.”

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/18 Mayors: combat online hate, extremism
SOURCE	https://statescoop.com/mayors-online-hate-extremism-disinformation-adl/
GIST	<p>Preventing the spread of disinformation and hate speech online, including on social media, is vital to reduce real-life acts of crime and domestic terrorism, a group of city leaders and disinformation researchers said Wednesday at the U.S. Conference of Mayors winter meeting in Washington.</p> <p>“We continue to see extremists use disinformation — some generated by them, and some generated by social media influencers, cable news influencers, and even, sadly, elected members of Congress and high-level elected officials — to fuel real-world violence and intimidation,” said Mary McCord, executive director of Georgetown Law’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection.</p>

It is important for mayors to be aware of this, McCord said, because extremist groups are increasingly working online to undermine local government and sow division in tight-knit communities.

“Post-Jan. 6, we did see a change in the extremist approach — we saw a decentralized local approach,” McCord said.

This strategy, known as “county over country,” is being used to disrupt and sow division in local communities, she said. Several mayors at the meeting said hate crimes are on the rise in their cities. Some shared their discomfort caused by hateful comments posted to their social media pages.

“There’s been an uptick in attacks on elected officials, and we need the federal government to step in on social media. They need to do a better job policing these platforms because this is where hate lives,” said Richmond, Virginia, Mayor Levar Stoney.

But [too few](#) police departments are reporting hate crimes to the FBI, U.S. Assistant Attorney General Vanita Gupta said during the session. She told the mayors to work with their law enforcement agencies and offer training on the [National Incident-Based Reporting System](#).

“There’s been a lot of focus on our prosecutions and convictions, but we cannot be effective without more accurate and comprehensive data collection and reporting,” Gupta said.

The Anti-Defamation League is working with the U.S. Conference of Mayors to understand how hate spreads in local communities, said Max Sevilla, vice president of government relations, advocacy and community engagement at the ADL, at the meeting.

Nearly 150 mayors around the country last September signed an [updated compact](#) between the ADL and the Conference of Mayors aimed at combatting hate, extremism and bigotry in their cities, Sevilla said.

Separately, the ADL is working to develop digital tools to help cities report hate crimes. In Edmonton, Canada, for example, the ADL recently [developed software](#) that enables people to report hate symbols spotted in public spaces.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Court holds Iran liable for terror attacks
SOURCE	https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/01/us-district-court-grants-default-judgement-against-iran-for-terrorist-attacks-on-us-citizens/
GIST	<p>The US District Court for the District of Columbia Tuesday granted partial default judgment against the Islamic Republic of Iran for failing to appear and defend itself against claims of aiding and abetting terrorists. The plaintiffs said that Iran provided “material support and resources to multiple terrorist organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan that perpetrated various attacks injuring them or their family members.” After Iran failed to appear in court, the court found that the plaintiffs established proper jurisdiction and proved that Iran committed assault, battery, and intentional infliction of emotional distress. As a result, the plaintiffs are entitled to damages.</p> <p>The plaintiffs, who include members of the US Army National Guard and their surviving family members, brought this action under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act (FISA), which grants foreign countries immunity in US courts. However, there is an exception that allows private citizens to seek relief for acts of terrorism.</p> <p>In support of their case, the plaintiffs presented an expert military counterterrorism witness who examined 26 alleged attacks that took place between 2003 and 2013 to determine whether they were committed, supported, or organized by Iran. The expert looked at factors such as “where [the attack] took place, the time, the weapons system used, the complexity of the attack, and what group had primacy in the relevant</p>

	<p>region.” Based on this expert testimony, the court determined that plaintiffs provided ample evidence to support their claims that “Iran materially supported the terrorist groups” in 25 out of the 26 alleged attacks.</p> <p>The plaintiffs may now petition the court to assess the damages they are owed.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Fla. man arrested; lied, hid ISIS support
SOURCE	https://www.yahoo.com/news/man-detained-central-florida-lied-145400446.html
GIST	<p>A man arrested last week on federal charges out of Orlando lied to federal agents about his past support for the Islamic State, including plans to travel overseas and join the organization, according to an indictment.</p> <p>Moad Mohamed Benkabbou faces three charges of making a false statement to a federal agency, stemming from claims he made in August to Federal Bureau of Investigation agents conducting a probe into international terrorism, the indictment dated Jan. 11 states.</p> <p>Benkabbou was arrested Friday, court records show, and pleaded not guilty to the charges at an initial court appearance Tuesday.</p> <p>According to the indictment, on Aug. 9, Benkabbou was asked whether he had ever talked to a man he knew as “Ahmed” about ISIS or another terrorist organization, responding, “No I didn’t.”</p> <p>In fact, Benkabbou had spoken in support of ISIS during “numerous discussions with that individual from in or about January 2020 to in or about August 2020, including discussions about joining ISIS; ISIS leadership; ISIS operations, training, and logistics; ISIS ideology; and ISIS networks of supporters,” the indictment said.</p> <p>Benkabbou also denied ever having made plans to travel overseas and join ISIS, the indictment states. But according to federal authorities, Benkabbou booked a plane ticket for that purpose in August 2020. He later canceled the flight, according to the indictment.</p> <p>He also falsely denied having pledged loyalty to ISIS, which he did on Jan. 31, 2020, prosecutors allege.</p> <p>Court records available Wednesday didn’t reveal any additional details about the investigation that led to the charges against Benkabbou or identify the man with whom he allegedly discussed his support for ISIS.</p> <p>Records show the case against Benkabbou is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Florida.</p> <p>ISIS, also known as the Islamic State or ISIL, is a militant Islamist group that the United States considers a foreign terrorist organization. At its height in the middle of the last decade, it controlled vast areas of Syria and Iraq.</p> <p>The gunman who killed 49 people at Orlando’s Pulse nightclub in 2016 pledged his support for ISIS when speaking to 911 operators and hostage negotiators during the massacre.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Turkey places NBA player on terror list
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/turkey-places-enes-freedom-on-terrorist-wanted-list/6924760.html
GIST	<p>Turkey has placed basketball player Enes Freedom on its terrorist wanted list.</p> <p>Freedom appears on what the Turkish Interior Ministry calls the “Grey List,” the lowest of its five-tier color-coded system, which offers a reward of up to about \$26,600 (500,000 Turkish lira).</p>

It is not clear when Turkey added Freedom to the list, but he told Fox News on Tuesday that he learned about it while he was at the Vatican for a basketball camp, and that after contacting the FBI, he was told he should return to the United States.

“This is the first time actually the Turkish government put a bounty on my head and put me on the most wanted terrorist list, just because I talk about some of the human rights violations and political prisoners happening in Turkey,” Freedom told Fox News. “And you know, I’m not the only one. There are so many journalists, academics, professors and celebrities are on that list.”

Freedom has been a critic of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the country’s human rights record, and he has called on the Biden administration and other Western and NATO leaders to take action.

Turkey issued an arrest warrant for him in 2019, accusing him of being a member of a terrorist group for his ties to U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen. Turkey blamed Gulen for a failed 2016 coup, which Gulen denies.

Freedom grew up in Turkey and changed his named from Enes Kanter after becoming a U.S. citizen in 2021. Turkey canceled his passport in 2017.

He played 11 seasons in the National Basketball Association, most recently in 2022 with the Boston Celtics.

In addition to speaking out against the Turkish government, Freedom has also criticized China’s human rights record, including its treatment of Tibet and the Uyghur people.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/18 Bird flu continues despite precautions
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3783920/fight-against-bird-flu-continues-despite-dept-agriculture-precautions/
GIST	<p>The current wave of bird flu — contributing to the high cost of poultry and eggs — continues to ravage flocks across the country.</p> <p>This outbreak of avian flu was first detected overseas and hit the United States in February of 2022, and it has spread with deadly results.</p> <p>“It’s actually led to the depopulation [deaths] of over 44 million laying hens in the country,” said Amber Betts, a spokesperson with the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).</p> <p>Betts says avian flu was detected in Washington state in May but turned up in its first commercial farm in Washington only last month. The flu has already killed over a million birds in our state.</p> <p>She said after a 2014 and 2015 outbreak of bird flu, farmers and the WSDA learned to take precautions, such as keeping farmers from inadvertently spreading the virus from flock to flock.</p> <p>In this outbreak, every case in Washington has been linked to wild birds, which can infect flocks by sharing a water source with them, getting into poultry pens, or dropping their feces while flying over pens.</p> <p>And Betts said we can’t always tell when wild birds are infected.</p> <p>“Though we do see the virus in waterfowl like ducks and geese, and we do see them die from it, what is really interesting is that they can actually have this virus and be carriers of it without showing any symptoms,” Betts said.</p>

	<p>The virus is challenging on a number of levels. Specifically, Betts said, “how long the virus lives in the environment and on surfaces, how quickly it spreads between the flocks, and how quickly it kills.”</p> <p>The state’s strategy for fighting the avian flu is to help flock owners quickly identify and test birds that are ill and then euthanize birds exposed to the virus to keep it from spreading.</p> <p>“We’re still working fast and furious to eradicate this virus,” Betts says. But time is not on anyone’s side. “We are hoping we can get it eradicated before it can reassert and become zoonotic, which means that it would jump from one species to another.”</p> <p>Although the H1N1 flu originated in swine and the COVID-19 virus came from bats or another animal, she stresses there is no evidence that this strain of avian flu has infected humans, and you can’t get it from eating eggs or poultry.</p> <p>But if the recent pandemic has taught us anything, it’s that we have to take these viruses seriously.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 ‘Rage applying’ new workers’ trend
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3783976/rage-applying-newest-trend-amongst-disgruntled-workforce/
GIST	<p>On the heels of the ‘great resignation’ and ‘quiet quitting’ comes a new trend — ‘rage applying’ — for those in America’s workforce who are less than satisfied.</p> <p>‘Rage applying’ is when employees, who are unhappy with pay or other conditions at work, are applying for a bunch of new jobs at once. The trend has been seen on TikTok and other social media, claiming it helped them find better jobs.</p> <p>“The way that we are working is fundamentally not working,” said Jenn Lim, CEO and co-founder of Delivering Happiness, in response to finding any reasons prompting these trends.</p> <p>Lim stated what became apparent to employees during the pandemic. For many, it exposed pay disparities, a lack of flexibility or appreciation on the job, and their desire to re-prioritize life in general.</p> <p>Delivering Happiness is a consulting company — or as she calls it “coach-sulting” — aiming to find the best workplace situations for its clients.</p> <p>“There’s no way we can get back to where we were because everything has changed,” Lim insisted.</p> <p>That goes for both employees and employers.</p> <p>So what should you do as an employee? For workers, Lim said, ask yourself a few questions and then approach your current boss for a better deal.</p> <p>“What’s in it for me — as in you, the employee — and then what’s in it for all? What’s in it for my boss? What’s in it for my organization? Coming to the table with that in mindset changes the whole thing, changes the whole conversation,” Lim said.</p> <p>Her advice for employers?</p> <p>“Have an open, honest, transparent conversation and not be judgmental. Not reprimanding, not coming from a place of ‘you’re going to get fired if you don’t do this or that.’ Really, it’s got to be more human-to-human conversation as to how we can get through this together.”</p> <p>She said it doesn’t always work.</p>

	But when employees and employers find that common vision moving forward, businesses may find they have workers who are satisfied and productive, and less likely to be looking for the next TikTok trend.
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HEADLINE	01/18 Grim reality slaughterhouse gas chambers
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/dex-pig-slaughterhouse-gas-chambers-videos/
GIST	<p>AT 4 AM one morning in October of last year, animal rights activist Raven Deerbrook sat on a bed in a cheap hotel in East Los Angeles, looking at a live video feed on her phone. She'd barely slept that night, waking every hour or two to check that the feed was transmitting from three pinhole infrared cameras she'd hidden in the Farmer John meatpacking plant 20 miles away. The facility, located in the LA suburb of Vernon, is owned by Smithfield Foods, the largest pork producer in the world. She waited, both anticipating and dreading what her cameras were about to reveal.</p> <p>A day earlier, Deerbrook had snuck into the slaughterhouse with a fake uniform and badge and climbed 26 feet underground into a "stunning chamber"—essentially a three-story-deep elevator shaft designed to be filled with carbon dioxide. Here, pigs in cages are lowered into the shaft's invisible swimming pool of suffocating, heavier-than-air CO₂, where the animals asphyxiate over a matter of minutes before being dumped out of the chamber onto a conveyor belt, hung up, drained of blood, and butchered.</p> <p>Deerbrook had hidden one camera pointed at that chamber from the plant's wall. She'd mounted two more with microphones on the car-sized cages within. When she'd tried to descend further down the shaft's ladder, a burning "air hunger" from residual CO₂ in the chamber had forced her to climb out again, gasping for breath, unable to plant her remaining cameras.</p> <p>Safely back in her hotel room across the city, Deerbrook hoped to record the slaughterhouse gas chamber, inside and out, for the first time in a US meat plant. In doing so, she aimed to disprove claims from the pork industry and the gas chamber manufacturer that this form of suffocation represents a humane—even "painless"—form of killing.</p> <p>At 5:25 am, as the plant's operations began for the morning, she saw the first half-dozen pigs herded into the chamber. Deerbrook's first thoughts were a mix of excitement and practical anxieties: Were the camera angles right? Was the frame rate high enough?</p> <p>Then the light in the video began to dim as the cage lowered into the carbon dioxide below. As Deerbrook watched, the pigs began to squeal and thrash violently around in the cage, struggling to escape and convulsing for nearly a minute before finally laying still. "Pigs are very human-like in their screaming. And I wasn't expecting to see them suffer for so long," she says. "I knew it was going to be bad. But I wasn't really prepared for the screaming."</p> <p>Deerbrook, still in her pajamas, sat on the hotel bed, staring at her phone screen in horror. The images and audio that she recorded would haunt her nightmares for months to come. "The only silver lining was the fact that I was able to download the footage," she says. "Because once I started getting those first video clips, I knew: At least this is going to be documented."</p> <p>Today, Direct Action Everywhere, the group of animal rights activists Deerbrook belongs to, released the footage on a new website, StopGasChambers.org, after providing the videos to WIRED in advance. The recordings are the first to reveal what really happens inside a US pig slaughterhouse gas chamber: They capture the truth of a method of animal slaughter that already dominates the meat industry in many countries around the world and is quickly growing among large-scale American meatpacking plants.</p> <p>The videos also show how repurposed surveillance technology is making it harder than ever for the meat industry to hide the details of its animal slaughter from the public: Direct Action Everywhere's activists used tiny spy cameras smaller than a coin to capture the footage. The entire setup—including enough batteries for days of recording, an infrared LED, a microphone, and a radio chip for transmitting the video in real time—is smaller than a credit card.</p>

Direct Action Everywhere, or DxE, says its latest videos contradict claims from the animal agriculture industry and the Iceland-based gas chamber manufacturer Marel—which sold the system used in the Farmer John meatpacking plant—that CO₂ asphyxiation of pigs improves animal welfare and reduces suffering. A group of 10 veterinarians who have seen DxE’s recordings have also signed an [open letter to the American Veterinary Medicine Association](#), published today, that argues based on the footage that the chambers likely violate US state and federal law governing animal slaughter.

CO₂ “stunning chambers”—a euphemism, perhaps, given that some experts say pigs usually die in them—have become increasingly commonplace in slaughterhouses around the world. They’re widespread in Europe and Australia and increasingly used in large US slaughterhouses, due to both their efficiency and their claimed benefits for animal welfare. Marel [states on its website](#) that its gas chambers can “stun” as many as 1,600 pigs an hour, and that the “stress-free” experience for animals improves the quality of their meat compared with older methods, such as the stunning by electrocution that was previously used in many US slaughterhouses. On its [website](#), Smithfield Foods claims that its CO₂ chambers lead to “painless loss of consciousness and death.”

Deerbrook argues that her video of pigs squealing and fighting for air entirely contradicts any such claim. “It’s an incredibly cruel and inhumane way to kill,” she says, adding, “When you see cows shot in the head or chickens being cut open while they’re still conscious, it’s really bad. But they don’t scream.”

DxE’s footage isn’t the first time that the inside of a slaughterhouse’s CO₂ stunning chamber has been captured on video. In 2014, the Australian animal rights group Aussie Farms was the first to use hidden cameras to capture [similar footage of pigs squealing and thrashing before collapsing](#) inside a smaller gas chamber in a slaughterhouse in New South Wales. But DxE’s videos represent the first time such footage has been captured inside the US—evidence DxE hopes to use to make the case that the CO₂ chambers violate US law.

Comparing the hidden cameras DxE used in its new investigation to those of Australian activists nearly nine years earlier also shows the evolution of the cat-and-mouse game between animal rights activists and the animal agriculture industry. Aussie Farms used pinhole cameras, like DxE, but had to connect them to digital video recorders nearly the size of a laptop—and then, because the cameras didn’t transmit the footage wirelessly, had to sneak back into the slaughterhouses to retrieve the devices that stored their recordings.

Deerbrook also used tiny cameras, specifically ones produced by Sony that are sometimes sold to law enforcement for hidden camera surveillance. But she was able to power them for days with small lithium-ion batteries and connected them via Wi-Fi to a hotspot generated by an Android phone that she hid on the top of the Marel gas chamber. That allowed her to both miniaturize her setup—hiding it in a small box that looked like a part of Marel’s equipment—and remotely connect to the cameras from another phone, miles away, downloading the footage with no need to retrieve her devices.

That improved operational stealth is increasingly necessary, Deerbrook says, as slaughterhouses have become warier of activists, improving their physical security, tightening their access controls, and searching out hidden surveillance devices. In an earlier attempt in 2020, in fact, Deerbrook hid cameras without remote connectivity in a slaughterhouse gas chamber, but those were discovered before she could retrieve any footage.

When WIRED reached out to Smithfield Foods and shared DxE’s videos with the company, it responded in a statement that “Smithfield is committed to the safety, health, and comfort of our animals and strictly follows approved laws, regulations and best practices for humane animal stunning prior to harvest. We adhere to all humane handling and stunning regulations for livestock with the oversight of the United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service.” The company pointed out that organizations like the USDA and the American Veterinary Medicine Association have recognized carbon dioxide gas chambers as complying with humane slaughter laws for years. It argued that “carbon dioxide stunning quickly renders hogs into a state of analgesia,” adding that its programs were “created in

consultation with two of the world's foremost experts in animal behavior and handling." Gas chamber manufacturing firm Marel didn't respond to WIRED's request for comment.

Counter to Smithfield's claims, several veterinarians, animal agriculture experts, and an animal welfare law professor who watched DxE's videos and others from research studies agree that the kind of reaction captured in the footage represents an inhumane and even illegal degree of pain.

"Those animals suffered terribly. They suffered horribly," says Jim Reynolds, a vet and professor at Western University's College of Veterinary Medicine who has served on the American Veterinary Medicine Association's panel for euthanasia guidelines. "It was absolutely a violation of federal law. They were not stunned. It was inhumane."

Reynolds says he watched at least 10 of DxE's clips from its investigation, and they left him disturbed for days. "I've actually seen a lot of horrible videos. This is the worst I've ever seen," he says. "I'm not eating pork from the United States anymore until somebody fixes these problems."

The Humane Methods of Slaughter Act states that any technique for stunning animals that's "rapid and effective" is legal, says Justin Marceau, a professor focused on animal law at the University of Denver's Sturm School of Law. But "it is difficult to believe that anyone could watch these videos and conclude that the method being used is either rapid or effective," says Marceau, who watched clips of DxE's footage. "You need to have methods that are reliable and rapid, and that is not what I see in these videos."

The veterinarians' letter to the AVMA that was sent to coincide with the release of DxE's footage echoes this view, arguing that the "extreme distress experienced by the pigs highlights the company's failure to comply with the Humane Slaughter Act and California law."

The US Department of Agriculture, which regulates the meatpacking industry in the country, didn't respond to WIRED's request for comment about the legality of Smithfield Foods' use of CO2 stunning chambers in its slaughterhouses.

Veterinarians disagree on what exactly to do about gas chambers. Most agree that compared with electrocution, which has to be performed on pigs one at a time, gas chambers are actually preferable in that they allow pigs to stay in groups, which reduces their stress. But the gas chambers also obscure what happens to the pigs after the chamber closes—including suffering that lasts far longer than electrocution. Temple Grandin, a renowned animal welfare expert and professor of animal science at Colorado State University, writes that "if the pigs violently attempt to escape when they first inhale the gas, this is not acceptable."

Some prominent researchers, like Cambridge University neuroscientist and animal welfare expert Donald Broom, have argued that argon gas puts pigs to sleep without the same degree of suffering as CO2. But Grandin counters that using argon is more expensive and so unlikely to be adopted by the pork industry. Instead, she suggests pigs could be genetically bred to have a less violent reaction to CO2. She says she's seen firsthand that some breeds of pigs die without showing signs of struggle inside CO2 gas chambers.

Three years ago, Grandin says, she and one of her students had planned to carry out a study in one meatpacking plant, owned by a major pig-rearing and slaughterhouse company, to put cameras inside a CO2 gas chamber and observe its effects on different breeds of pigs. Just days before the study was set to begin, according to Grandin, the company canceled the project. "I was furious," she says.

"I wanted to try to fix this problem," Grandin adds. "They didn't want to look inside the box."

DxE's Deerbrook says the first step toward any solution is for meatpacking plants and the USDA to use their own cameras to monitor what happens to animals inside slaughterhouse gas chambers. (She says she saw none during her climb into Farmer John's pit.) She doesn't want to prescribe a fix or tweak for those machines but rather to expose the cruelty they hide—and expose regulators' unwillingness to enforce the animal welfare laws she says they violate.

	“We’re saying, ‘You’re not looking in here because you know this is inhumane,’” says Deerbrook. “You need to witness what you’re doing. You need to look inside.”
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HEADLINE	01/18 Greenland hottest in more than 1,000yrs
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/new-ice-core-analysis-shows-sharp-greenland-warming-spike/
GIST	<p>A sharp spike in Greenland temperatures since 1995 showed the giant northern island 2.7 degrees (1.5 degrees Celsius) hotter than its 20th-century average, the warmest in more than 1,000 years, according to new ice core data.</p> <p>Until now Greenland ice cores — a glimpse into long-running temperatures before thermometers — hadn’t shown much of a clear signal of global warming on the remotest north central part of the island, at least compared to the rest of the world. But the ice cores also hadn’t been updated since 1995. Newly analyzed cores, drilled in 2011, show a dramatic rise in temperature in the previous 15 years, according to a study in Wednesday’s journal Nature.</p> <p>“We keep on (seeing) rising temperatures between 1990s and 2011,” said study lead author Maria Hoerhold, a glaciologist at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany. “We have now a clear signature of global warming.”</p> <p>It takes years to analyze ice core data. Hoerhold has new cores from 2019 but hasn’t finished studying them yet. She expects the temperature rise to continue as Greenland’s ice sheet and glaciers have been melting faster recently.</p> <p>“This is an important finding and corroborates the suspicion that the ‘missing warming’ in the ice cores is due to the fact that the cores end before the strong warming sets in,” said climate scientist Martin Stendel of the Danish Meteorological Institute, who wasn’t part of the research.</p> <p>The ice cores are used to make a chart of proxy temperatures for Greenland running from the year 1000 to 2011. It shows temperatures gently sloping cooler for the first 800 years, then wiggling up and down while sloping warmer until a sharp and sudden spike hotter from the 1990s on. One scientist compared it to a hockey stick, a description used for other long-term temperature data showing climate change.</p> <p>The jump in temperature after 1995 is so much larger than pre-industrial times before the mid-19th century that there is “almost zero” chance that it is anything but human-caused climate change, Hoerhold said.</p> <p>The warming spike also mirrors a sudden rise in the amount of water running off from Greenland’s melting ice, the study finds.</p> <p>What had been happening in Greenland is that natural weather variability, undulations because of an occasional weather system called Greenland blocking, in the past had masked human-caused climate change, Hoerhold said.</p> <p>But as of about 25 years ago, the warming became too big to be hidden, she said.</p> <p>Past data also showed Greenland not warming as fast as the rest of the Arctic, which is now warming four times faster than the global average. But the island appears to be catching up.</p> <p>Ice core data for years showed Greenland acted a bit differently from the Arctic. That’s likely because of Greenland blocking, Hoerhold said. Other scientists said as a giant land mass Greenland was less affected by melting sea ice and other water factors compared to the rest of the Arctic, which is much more water-adjacent.</p>

Hoerhold's team drilled five new cores near old cores so as to match established ice core records. They use the difference between two different types of oxygen isotopes found in the ice to calculate temperature, using an already established formula that is checked against observed data.

Hoerhold and outside scientists said the new warming data is bad news because Greenland's ice sheet is melting. In fact, the study ends with data from 2011 and the next year had a record melt across Greenland and the island's ice loss has been on high since then, she said.

"We should be very concerned about North Greenland warming because that region has a dozen sleeping giants in the form of wide tidewater glaciers and an ice stream," said Danish Meteorological Institute ice scientist Jason Box. And when awakened, it will ramp up melt from Greenland, he said.

And that means "rising seas that threaten homes, businesses, economies and communities," said U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center Deputy Lead Scientist Twila Moon.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/19 Federal probe: child labor human trafficking
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-dhs-investigating-human-trafficking-children-slaughterhouses-rcna66081
GIST	<p>Federal investigators are looking into whether 50 children — some as young as 13 — who were allegedly illegally employed cleaning Midwestern slaughterhouses were victims of labor trafficking, three officials from the Department of Homeland Security told NBC News.</p> <p>Homeland Security Investigations agents have interviewed children who worked cleaning a JBS Foods slaughterhouse in Grand Island, Nebraska, the officials say.</p> <p>There is no indication DHS is investigating the company that hired the children, Packers Sanitation Services Inc., or PSSI, for human trafficking. Instead, said two DHS officials, DHS is investigating to rule out the possibility that outside traffickers may have forced children to work for PSSI and profited off their labor.</p> <p>In a statement, a spokesperson for Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, a division of DHS, said, "Due to an ongoing investigation, Homeland Security Investigations cannot comment at this time," and referred questions to the U.S. Labor Department.</p> <p>In December, as a result of an investigation by the Labor Department and a civil suit filed against the company by the government, PSSI agreed to a consent order with the department and agreed to abide by child labor laws. Labor investigators had found a total of 50 children working for PSSI in at least five locations, including the Grand Island plant and a second JBS Foods plant in Worthington, Minnesota.</p> <p>Federal officials argued the company violated the Fair Labor Standards Act, which prohibits "oppressive child labor" and minors from working in any kind of hazardous employment, according to the complaint from December. The Labor Department's Child Labor Regulations designate many roles in slaughterhouse and meatpacking facilities as hazardous for minors.</p> <p>In court filings, the company did not deny hiring children but attributed it to "rogue individuals" who presented fake identification with Social Security numbers that were verified by the federal government's E-Verify system.</p> <p>The Labor Department says its investigation, which began in August, is ongoing as it scours company records from 50 locations.</p>

Gina Swenson, a spokesperson for PSSI, said investigators from Homeland Security Investigations have not contacted the company. “We have not been contacted by DHS and have no knowledge that any such investigation exists,” she said.

“We have always taken rigorous steps to comply with the law, including use of the government’s E-Verify system for new hires, extensive training for all hiring managers, multiple audits, and use of biometrics,” Swenson said. “Our compliance plans are also modeled after the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) recommended best practices.”

Homeland Security Investigations’ inquiry into possible human trafficking was triggered by the large numbers of migrant minors involved in the case and not necessarily by specific allegations of trafficking, two DHS officials say.

PSSI’s 17,000 employees clean the largest meat processing plants in America for household brands at 700 sites across the country.

Local officials and advocates in Grand Island and Worthington say they have noticed an increase in the number of Spanish-speaking unaccompanied minors in their areas in recent years, an observation supported by Health and Human Services data. The youngest person found to be cleaning slaughterhouses for PSSI was 13.

The children who worked for PSSI attended school during the day and worked overnight facing dangerous conditions, with some as young as 13 and 14 found to have chemical burns on their hands from exposure to strong cleaning chemicals, according to court documents the government filed in its lawsuit against PSSI and a local police report [previously obtained and reported](#) by NBC News.

According to four former PSSI employees, cleaning conditions inside the meatpacking plants are treacherous. A former PSSI compliance officer who still works in the industry and did not want to be identified said the “kill floors” in meatpacking plants have a slippery combination of hot water, animal fat and soap that she likened to an ice rink.

Swenson of PSSI said worker safety “has been the [company’s] highest priority.”

“Because of our work,” she said, “all our team members must wear personal protective equipment from head to toe (e.g., hard hat, face shield, goggles, aprons, gloves, boots, etc.).”

In 2020 a PSSI worker at an Alabama Tyson chicken plant was rinsing equipment with a high-pressure water hose when he leaned too far into the machine and was caught by the machinery and decapitated. Occupational Safety and Health Administration officials [cited](#) the company for the accident.

Swenson said that the death of the employee was “profoundly sad and tragic” but that PSSI’s investigation of the accident “unfortunately revealed that this employee started cleaning the energized equipment without a supervisor present — meaning existing PSSI safety protocols were not followed.”

JBS Foods cancels contracts

Fallout from the Labor Department’s child labor investigation and the company’s consent order with the federal government has been swift.

JBS Foods canceled its contracts with PSSI in Grand Island and Worthington, which led to layoffs of hundreds of workers. Tyson Foods has not canceled its contract. It said in a statement to NBC News: “We are actively engaging our supplier community to conduct a detailed review of their processes to ensure Tyson’s rigorous standards are being met.”

Swenson confirmed that JBS had canceled two contracts. “As we’ve made clear from the start, PSSI has an absolute company-wide prohibition against the employment of anyone under the age of 18 and zero

tolerance for any violation of that policy — period. PSSI strives to be the leader in food safety solutions and is committed to ensuring our customers can depend on us as experts at what we do.”

But Audrey Lutz, the executive director of a local Nebraska nonprofit group called the Multicultural Coalition, which has been helping the children in Grand Island with services, believes significant fines from the federal government are needed. “This has been going on quite a while. I don’t anticipate unless there are severe ramifications for this that it will actually change policies.”

The Labor Department has issued no penalties or fines to date. The company is required to report back to Labor in mid-January with the names of any employees it terminated because they were under 18. A Labor Department spokesperson said the numbers of child employees who were terminated will not be disclosed while the case remains open.

Questions about child labor at PSSI in Grand Island and Worthington are not new.

A Worthington police report from 2018 obtained by NBC News shows a PSSI employee who was a local high school student was arrested for identity theft. The worker told police he was 17 years old. He had a pay stub from his employment at PSSI and was ultimately released because police could not determine his real age.

Swenson of PSSI said, “We have made clear that the only way that someone could circumvent our rigorous procedures is through deliberate identity theft or fraud.”

As NBC News previously reported, a 2016 Nebraska police report documented how a middle school official called local police because a 14-year-old student had caustic burns on her hands. A police spokesperson said the injuries were from her overnight PSSI job. Local police investigated it as potential child abuse by the guardian for allowing the child to work at the plant; no one was ultimately charged.

In 2015, federal investigators started looking into allegations that PSSI employed child labor to clean a third JBS facility in the small town of Liberal, Kansas, according to court records. But the investigation stopped in 2017 after PSSI did not cooperate with the Labor Department and “did not provide all records as requested,” according to an affidavit from a federal investigator filed in court.

Swenson said, “We categorically dispute this claim related to this Kansas site and more broadly: PSSI has a long history of fully cooperating and complying with DOL investigations, including three separate DOL investigations that the company closed in the summer of 2022 with no violations.”

Unaccompanied minors as workers

Advocates and lawyers for the children say some of the child workers for PSSI were unaccompanied minors who recently came across the southern border. Unaccompanied minors are processed by the Border Patrol and then turned over to the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services. The children are then matched with sponsors who usually have some link to their families.

Rural counties where the Labor Department found children working in PSSI facilities have become home to hundreds of unaccompanied minors living with sponsors since 2015, according to data collected and released by HHS. Advocates and officials are concerned that some of the minors may be working in the counties’ significant livestock industry.

In Grand Island, where children were found to be working in the JBS plant, the number of unaccompanied minors has ebbed and flowed over the years. In 2016, 63 were released to sponsors. Then there were none until 2019, when 71 arrived. In 2021, 90 children arrived and then 89 more in 2022.

In Nobles County, Minnesota, where the Labor Department says children were found working for PSSI at the Worthington JBS plant, federal data shows 613 children have been released to sponsors since 2015. The city of Worthington has fewer than 14,000 residents, and Nobles County as a whole has just 22,000.

	<p>Drawing on HHS data, The Washington Post reported that from 2013 to 2019, Nobles County received the second-highest total unaccompanied migrant minors per capita of any U.S. county.</p> <p>Worthington City Administrator Steve Robinson said city officials have been wondering how the children found their way to their rural community.</p> <p>“We want to make sure that no one is taking advantage of these kids. We are worried about their well-being,” he said.</p> <p>David Bosma works in the livestock industry in Worthington and has been active in local school issues. He told NBC News that he was not surprised when the Labor Department’s investigation came to light, because community members already had questions about the influx of unaccompanied minors. “Nobody understood where these kids were coming from,” he said.</p> <p>Advocates and lawyers have expressed concern that children who are without their parents and do not speak English could be at risk.</p> <p>“There is a large number of unaccompanied minors in our state with very little resources, and without public, private or philanthropic resources these kids go off the radar and become very, very vulnerable to things like trafficking,” Lutz said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Snohomish Co. antisemitism hate crimes
SOURCE	https://lynnwoodtimes.com/2023/01/18/antisemitism-definition-01182023/
GIST	<p>SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., January 18, 2023—The Snohomish County Council unanimously approves resolution 2023-0072 adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism today, January 18, at its General Legislative Session.</p> <p>John Michael Graves, with StandWithUs, an international educational organization, spoke in favor of the resolution, sharing a time when he walked to his favorite deli with a friend only to see “end race-based murders, boycott Israel” spray painted on the side of the building. He likened this feeling to what he believed Chinese Americans felt about Covid-related Anti-Asian American discrimination.</p> <p>“Each of the students I educate have a similar story to tell,” <i>Michael said</i>. “Antisemitism is happening today and its perpetrators are becoming emboldened at a rate unseen in decades.”</p> <p>Antisemitism incidents reached an all-time high in 2021—a 34% increase from 2020 making recent years the highest on record since the Anti-Defamation League began their tracking in 1979.</p> <p>The FBI’s crime statistics show that although Jews make up only 2.4% of the U.S. they are victims of around 60-63% of religious hate crimes. FBI Director Christopher Ray stated that Jews are getting “hit from all sides.”</p> <p>Last year the State of Washington recorded the highest rate of hate crimes in the last 20 years.</p> <p>Michael pointed out that “what makes antisemitism persistent is that it mutates like a virus. It mutates and manifests in ways that are harder for leaders to identify.” It once started out as vilifying Jews for the religious beliefs and traditions, then focused on race believing Jews to be inferior to pure-white Aryans, then focused on economic issues accusing Jews of being capitalists or communists, then connected to Nationalism criticizing Jews for being stateless then criticizing them for having their own state, Michael continued.</p> <p>“It comes from both the extremist far right and the extremist far left,” <i>Michael said</i>.</p> <p>This mutating virus Michael spoke of is exactly why the county needed to adopt the resolution where a 2023 definition of antisemitism is not the same as a 1943 definition of antisemitism. The resolution does</p>

	<p>not prohibit free speech or constitutional right, Michael pointed out, but simply adds a working definition in order to recognize hate crimes as antisemitic.</p> <p>Council members in over 40 nations, thousands of entities, and multiple U.S. states have adopted the Antisemitism definition.</p> <p>On December 13, the city of Mill Creek became the first Snohomish County city to adopt a resolution condemning antisemitism. The County Council had previously signed a proclamation condemning antisemitism on December 1.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Atlanta: protesters call for 'violence'
SOURCE	https://wfin.com/fox-national-news/atlanta-protesters-call-for-violence-against-police-after-shooting-leaves-1-dead-officer-injured/
GIST	<p>Protesters in Atlanta, are calling for violence against police officers and law enforcement entities following a police-involved shooting on Wednesday that left a state trooper wounded and one man dead.</p> <p>The Twitter account Scenes from the Atlanta Forest calls for a “Night of Rage” on Friday to enact “reciprocal violence to be done to the police and their allies,” according to the Scenes from the Atlanta Forest Twitter account.</p> <p>“Consider this a call for reciprocal violence to be done to the police and their allies. On Friday, January 20th, wherever you are, you are invited to participate in a night of rage in order to honor the memory of our fallen comrade,” the group wrote on Twitter, in an apparent violation of the platform’s terms and conditions.</p> <p>The account claims to be a part of Defend the Atlanta Forest, one of the multiple groups protesting in an area where the city is set to construct the new Atlanta Public Safety Training Center.</p> <p>The Defenders of the Forest said in a statement to Fox News Digital that it is “a broad, diverse, decentralized movement to defend the Atlanta forest.” They went on to say they are only a “news aggregator for the movement” and “not affiliated” with Scenes from the Atlanta Forest.</p> <p>In another tweet, posted several hours later, the group added: “The police will kill you if given the chance. Now is the time for bravery. Take care of each other. Be dangerous together.”</p> <p>The group appeared to acknowledge the post was against Twitter’s rule not to incite violence as it said in yet another tweet that its account “is not long for this world.”</p> <p>The upcoming event comes after a Georgia State Patrol trooper, wearing a bulletproof vest, was shot in the abdomen Wednesday morning. It happened as police tried to clear an encampment near the site where the \$90 million Atlanta Police Department (APD) facility will be constructed.</p> <p>The sweep was conducted as “an operation to identify people who are trespassing and committing other crimes on the property,” the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) said.</p> <p>“At about 9:00 a.m. today, as law enforcement was moving through the property, officers located a man inside a tent in the woods. Officers gave verbal commands to the man who did not comply and shot a Georgia State Patrol Trooper,” GBI said in a statement. “Other law enforcement officers returned fire, hitting the man.”</p> <p>“Law enforcement evacuated the Trooper to a safe area. The man died on scene,” it added.</p>

The bureau continued: “The injured Georgia State Patrol Trooper was taken to a local hospital where he underwent surgery. A handgun and shell casings were located at the scene. The GBI is working the officer-involved shooting and the investigation is still active and ongoing.”

The identities of the officer and the deceased have not yet been released. The officer was hospitalized and is in stable condition.

During a press conference, GBI director Michael Register confirmed that the shooting was in self-defense after the now-deceased individual opened fire “without warning” on the trooper.

“An individual, without warning, shot a Georgia State Patrol trooper,” Register told reporters. “Other law enforcement personnel returned fire in self-defense and evacuated the trooper to a safe area. The individual who fired upon law enforcement and shot the trooper was killed in the exchange of gunfire.”

Four others were arrested at the scene and taken to the DeKalb County Jail. Charges are pending.

“They’re endangering the community and the citizens around this area,” Register said of the encampment and the protesters, FOX 5 Atlanta reported.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp also commented on the shooting and said he and his family were praying for law enforcement officers.

“Marty, the girls, and I are praying for this brave Trooper and public safety officers across all law enforcement agencies today,” he tweeted Wednesday morning. “As our thoughts remain with him and his family, our resolve also remains steadfast and strong to see criminals brought to justice.”

The joint task force formed to combat ongoing criminal activity at the APD site includes the GBI, Atlanta Police Department, Georgia Attorney General’s Office, DeKalb County District Attorney’s Office, Georgia State Patrol, FBI, DeKalb County Police Department, Department of Natural Resources, and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA).

Defend the Atlanta Forest held a vigil Wednesday evening at the Little Five Points Square to “memorialize the forest defender” that was “murdered by the police,” it announced on Twitter.

“Today the police shot and killed a forest defender below the canopy of our beloved forest,” the group said. “No one can bring our friend back to us. An innocent life has been taken and the machines continue.”

“We will not go quietly into this dark night,” it added.

“Police killed a forest defender today, someone who loved the forest, someone who fought to protect the earth & its inhabitants,” the group continued in a tweet.

And: “This is why we organize to stop Cop City. And we will. In honor of their life, and the lives of everyone killed and imprisoned by the police.”

The group also announced another event on Jan. 21, where members are encouraged to “wear black in mourning” for the dead member.

These events come amid heightened tension between protesters and the police, involving several arrests over several months over the APD construction.

“The Atlanta Police Department seeks to turn 300 acres of forest into a tactical training compound featuring a mock city. This project was announced to the shock of community members who had been given no opportunity to weigh in on the proposal. The entire process has been shadier than the forest itself,” Defend the Atlanta Forest’s website reads.

According to the group, they are explicitly protesting the new “Cop City” as it will “hyper-militarize law enforcement” and “will serve as a national model of police militarization and budgetary bloat.”

The group names the 2020 death of George Floyd and others as its motivation to protest police violence.

The group also claims it does not advocate for violence and that “no one has been harmed by participants in this movement.”

Last week, anarchists in Atlanta also targeted Brasfield & Gorrie, the general contractor of the police facility, and spray-painted graffiti on its buildings.

“B&G stop cop city,” the graffiti read, according to photos. “We have the numbers,” another spray-painted message read.

Also, last month, police arrested five people at the APD site location. They were also charged with domestic terrorism.

On Dec. 14, the GBI wrote: “Yesterday, December 13, 2022, our agents assisted APD and other local, state, and task force members in an operation to remove barricades blocking some of the entrances to the training center.”

“Prior to yesterday’s operation, APD and other agencies had made several arrests over the past few months for the ongoing criminal activity at the site location. Some of the criminal activities include carjacking, various crimes against persons, destruction of property, arson, and attacks against public safety officials. Law enforcement continues to address the criminal acts committed by the individuals that continue to occupy the area of the proposed training site,” it said.

The arrested individuals included Francis Carroll, age 22, of Maine, Nicholas Olson, age 25, of Nebraska, Serena Hertel, age 25, of California, Leonardo Vioselle, age 20, of Macon, GA, and Arieon Robinson, age 22, of Wisconsin.

“After police cleared the area of concern, which included makeshift treehouses, they found explosive devices, gasoline, and road flares,” the GBI said in its statement on Jan. 14.

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HEADLINE	01/18 ‘Substance’ sickens IL prison staff, inmates
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/unknown-substance-sickens-illinois-prison-staff-inmates/
GIST	<p>SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — Several employees of a central Illinois prison were treated at hospitals Wednesday after they became sickened while responding to one or more inmates suffering severe discomfort, according to a prison spokesperson and a prison employees’ union representative.</p> <p>Officials said 18 staff members at John A. Graham Correctional Center in Hillsboro required treatment at area hospitals.</p> <p>An undisclosed number of inmates received treatment in the health care unit of the prison about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northeast of St. Louis.</p> <p>An Illinois State Police hazardous materials team is investigating, state Department of Corrections spokesperson Naomi Puzzello said in a statement.</p> <p>The staff members became ill after a prison employee responded to a “medical incident involving individuals in custody who appeared to be under the influence of an unknown substance,” Puzzello said.</p> <p>“All staff members who may have potentially encountered the unknown substance were also sent to a local hospital, as a precaution. All staff are stable currently and many have already been discharged,” Puzzello said.</p>

Prison officers and other staff who responded to the emergency call became ill, some violently, when they came near the affected inmates, said Anders Lindall of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 31, an employee union.

“Those who were in proximity to the inmate were immediately overcome with a variety of symptoms: Lightheadedness, dizziness, vomiting or feeling nauseous,” Lindall said.

Many staff members received medical care at Hillsboro Area Hospital. When the facility reached capacity, others sought treatment at HSHS St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield, 10 miles (16 kilometers) west. Most were released but several were kept for observation and testing to determine the cause, Lindall said.

AFSCME’s state council has expressed growing concern about prison employees coming in contact with dangerous substances.

“The issue of exposure to harmful substances in prisons is increasing,” Lindall said, adding that prisons need better searches. “AFSCME has been sounding the alarm for months to tighten up the protocol for both incoming mail and visitor screening.”

Lindall said a union meeting was underway at the prison when the call went out and members broke up the gathering to transport colleagues to the hospital, alert family members and provide other assistance.

Graham Correctional Center is a medium-security lockup for adult males, which opened in 1980 with room for 1,596 inmates. The prison currently houses 1,328 inmates.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Search of Idaho stabbing suspect’s home
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-seize-bedding-from-idaho-stabbing-suspects-home/
GIST	<p>BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Investigators seized stained bedding, strands of what looked like hair and a single glove — but no weapon — when they searched the Washington state apartment of a graduate student charged with stabbing four University of Idaho students to death, according to newly unsealed court documents.</p> <p>The search warrant for Bryan Kohberger ’s home and Washington State University office was unsealed by a Washington state judge on Tuesday. Kohberger is charged with four counts of first-degree murder and burglary in connection with the slayings of Madison Mogen, Kaylee Goncalves, Xana Kernodle and Ethan Chapin in the neighboring town of Moscow, Idaho.</p> <p>Investigators did not find anything noteworthy in Kohberger’s office at WSU, where he was a teaching assistant and graduate student studying criminology. They took 15 things from his on-campus apartment, including a nitrite-type black glove, cuttings from a pillow with a reddish-brown stain, and a stained mattress cover.</p> <p>The Washington State University Police Department searched the apartment Dec. 30, the same day Kohberger was arrested at his parent’s home in eastern Pennsylvania.</p> <p>The Nov. 13, 2022, slayings of the four University of Idaho students left many in the community shaken and worried about the possibility of a repeat attack. Police released few details for weeks but repeatedly said they had not located the weapon used to commit the crime.</p> <p>After Kohberger was extradited to Idaho, documents filed in the murder case showed that police found the sheath of a large knife near one of the victims. The knife itself, however, was nowhere to be found.</p> <p>Investigators did not seize any weapon from Kohberger’s apartment, according to the search warrant. They did take several strands of “possible hair,” including one identified as a “possible animal hair strand.”</p>

	<p>They also took some store receipts, a tag from a company that makes coveralls and other work apparel, and two store receipts. The dust bin from a vacuum cleaner, a computer tower and a “Fire TV” stick were collected as well.</p> <p>In the application for the search warrant, Moscow Police Sgt. Dustin Baker said investigators were seeking several kinds of potential evidence, including images of the stabbing victims or their home, data that might indicate an interest in planning murders or violence, anything with DNA and dark clothing and knives.</p> <p>The court documents do not reveal if the items collected from Kohberger’s home contained any evidence related to the murder case.</p> <p>Kohberger has not yet had the opportunity to enter a plea, and Latah County Magistrate Judge Megan Marshall has placed the attorneys and other people involved with the case under a sweeping gag order.</p> <p>Kohberger is scheduled to have a preliminary hearing — where the judge will decide if there is enough evidence to justify the felony charges — on June 26.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/19 Thailand university gang violence
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxn3yw/student-shot-dead-as-thailands-strange-trend-of-university-gang-violence-resurfaces
GIST	<p>A 21-year-old was killed in a drive-by shooting in Bangkok on Saturday in what authorities suspect to be an attack by students from a rival school.</p> <p>Kritsana Laemkaeo, a third-year civil engineering student at the Rajamangala University of Technology Tawan-ok Uthenthawai Campus (RMUTTO), was walking along the sidewalk when two men on a motorbike rode past and opened fire. Kritsana tried to run away but was shot in the head, and lay motionless near a bus stop until his friends rushed him to the hospital, local media reported.</p> <p>The deadly attack, which took place around 8.40 p.m., was captured on security camera, showing two men wearing white shirts and motorcycle helmets. The attackers are still on the run. Police officials say the shooting was carefully planned, and the gunmen are believed to be from a rival university.</p> <p>The shooting has reignited attention on student gangs in Thailand, especially in vocational schools where students are taught specifically for jobs like mechanics and electricians. These students have been known to become involved in violent clashes between rival groups stretching back at least a decade—though neither students nor experts know exactly how the grievances began.</p> <p>What is known is that many of the students come from low-income families—often from outside the city—and are integrated into tight-knit and loyal communities in their schools.</p> <p>“For me, it was never a question,” a former Uthentawai student told VICE News in 2016. “If I see someone from Pathumwan [a rival university], we must fight. And they feel the same towards me.”</p> <p>Although most of the violence comes in the form of hand-to-hand brawls or knife fights, the use of guns is seemingly becoming more common.</p> <p>In August last year, over a hundred students from RMUTTO, and its rival Pathumwan Institute of Technology, brawled near a stadium. As chaos broke out, police officers deployed to the scene were unable to prevent the fight, and could only wait for the students to return to their schools.</p> <p>Last year, police searched the RMUTTO campus and found knives and firearm ammunition, after a video went viral of students firing a gun into the air in the school compound, sparking condemnation from even the country’s leader Prayut Chan-o-Cha.</p>

	<p>“For all alumni and students, I think it’s enough,” the Thai Prime Minister said in reference to the video. “What they did was to damage the country, society and law and order.”</p> <p>Thailand has one of the highest gun possession rates in Asia, with around 10.3 million guns recorded in the country as of 2017. At least 6.2 million of these firearms were obtained legally while the rest came from the black market. Thailand’s prime minister called for tighter gun laws after a massacre in October saw a man open fire at a preschool before stabbing dozens of sleeping children to death, in the deadliest mass murder by a lone attacker in Thailand’s recent history.</p> <p>There is no clear motive for Saturday’s shooting. Kritsana’s family told local media that he had always said that he wanted to earn money to support his family, and was not known to have conflicts with other people.</p> <p>After the attack, RMUTTO announced three days of online learning for its students for their safety, while authorities said they would station officers throughout the campus.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Italy police: secret bunker mafia boss
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/18/italian-police-find-suspected-secret-bunker-of-captured-mafia-boss
GIST	<p>Italian military police have found a possible secret bunker suspected of being used by Matteo Messina Denaro, the “last godfather” of the Sicilian mafia who was arrested on Monday after 30 years on the run.</p> <p>The entrance to the bunker was concealed in a closet full of clothes in a house in Campobello di Mazara, a small town in Sicily where the apartment Denaro, 60, had been living in was discovered on Tuesday.</p> <p>Investigators said they had found emeralds, diamonds and other gemstones, but they were also searching for documents believed to be in Denaro’s possession, in particular a “secret archive” of the Sicilian mafia’s “boss of bosses” Totò Riina, who died in 2017, which, according to some mafia informers, was stolen by Denaro and allegedly contains the secrets of the last 40 years of mafia killings.</p> <p>Prosecutors believe Denaro holds the key to some of the most heinous crimes perpetrated by the Sicilian mafia, including the bomb attacks in 1992 that killed the anti-mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino and the killing in 1996 of Giuseppe Di Matteo, the 12-year-old son of a mobster turned state witness who was strangled and dissolved in acid.</p> <p>Denaro was in 2002 convicted and sentenced in absentia to life in prison for having personally killed or ordered the murders of dozens of people.</p> <p>Nicknamed Diabolik or U Siccu (the skinny one), Denaro was born in Castelvetro, Sicily, in 1962. His father was a powerful Cosa Nostra boss and Denaro thrived in the family business, building an illicit multibillion-euro empire in the waste disposal, wind energy and retail sectors.</p> <p>In order to protect themselves, mafia bosses in Italy are known for building escape tunnels under their houses, sophisticated bunkers in mountains that are reachable only on foot and hideouts in the woods for when they are on the run.</p> <p>The function and size of the structure in Campobello di Mazara is not yet fully known. Denaro was arrested on Monday at a medical clinic in Palermo, where he was receiving treatment for a tumour.</p> <p>The house, located in Via Maggiore Toselli, allegedly belongs to a man who was previously tried for mafia association and acquitted in 2001.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Atlanta: protester killed, trooper injured
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/us/atlanta-police-center-protester-killed.html
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — Longstanding tensions over a planned Atlanta police training center boiled over on Wednesday when a protester was killed and a Georgia state trooper was wounded during a confrontation in the wooded area just outside the city where the center is to be built, the authorities said.</p> <p>The shootings happened as the police worked to clear protesters out of the woods, according to law enforcement officials and activists who oppose the center. At least four people were also detained in the sweep, the authorities said.</p> <p>The plans for the training center call for it to be built on 85 acres of forested land, and include an area for police trainees to learn vehicle skills and even a mock village, with space for facsimiles of a nightclub, a convenience store and homes to practice different tactics in an array of settings.</p> <p>But the proposal has been assailed from the outset by critics of the Atlanta Police Department who have described the \$90 million development — derisively nicknamed “Cop City” — as a dangerous investment in militarizing law enforcement. Activists have moved into the forest, and their efforts to block construction have escalated in recent months into violent confrontations with law enforcement officers.</p> <p>The circumstances surrounding the fatal shooting remained unclear on Wednesday, with investigators disclosing few details of what happened and activists challenging the official description of events.</p> <p>“No one can bring our friend back to us,” the activists said in a statement published by the Atlanta Community Press Collective, a digital outlet aligned with the protesters. “An innocent life has been taken and the machines continue.”</p> <p>But the authorities have sought to portray the actions of those involved with the “Defend the Atlanta Forest” effort as perpetrating something more sinister.</p> <p>“These individuals and groups have attempted to disguise their activities as being protests,” Michael Register, the director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, told reporters on Wednesday, adding that “law enforcement and portions of our community have experienced growing criminal behavior and terroristic acts.”</p> <p>He said the activists had been accused of arson and setting traps in the woods capable of causing serious physical harm. Last month, prosecutors took the unusual step of charging six people connected to the Defend the Atlanta Forest effort with domestic terrorism. Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia has vowed to maintain the aggressive approach. “The only response we will give to intimidation and violence is swift and exact justice,” he said in a recent statement.</p> <p>Mr. Register said there was an exchange of gunfire on Wednesday morning during a “planned clearing operation” by law enforcement agencies in the forest, located in an unincorporated area of DeKalb County, just outside of Atlanta.</p> <p>Mr. Register said that a person shot “without warning,” hitting the trooper, and officers returned fire. The person who was killed has not been identified by the authorities or the activists.</p> <p>Activists with the Defend the Atlanta Forest effort have challenged the official account and argued that no activists fired upon officers. The Atlanta Solidarity Fund, an organization providing legal support to activists, said it was planning to pursue “a vigorous legal strategy” to examine the circumstances surrounding the protester’s death. “We are committed to finding out what actually happened,” said Marlon Kautz, an organizer with the Solidarity Fund.</p> <p>The trooper was hit in the lower abdomen and was hospitalized and required surgery, but his condition had stabilized, officials said. “His vitals are good,” Col. Chris Wright, the commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Safety, said in a news conference on Wednesday. “He certainly has a long road to recovery.”</p>

In a statement on Wednesday, Mr. Kemp said, “As our thoughts remain with him and his family, our resolve also remains steadfast and strong to see criminals brought to justice.”

Mayor Andre Dickens of Atlanta said that the city and the Police Department were “providing full support to our state and county partners as they secure the site in DeKalb County and investigate the incident.”

The fight over the training center has come as Atlanta has been roiled in recent years by a swirl of tensions over crime and policing.

Protests erupted in Atlanta, as in many other cities across the country, in 2020 after [George Floyd was killed](#) by Minneapolis police officers. And tensions exploded soon after when Rayshard Brooks, a 27-year-old Black man, [was fatally shot by the Atlanta police](#) in the drive-through of a fast-food restaurant.

After the shooting, the Wendy’s restaurant where it happened was burned down by protesters. On July 4, 2020, an 8-year-old girl, Secoria Turner, [was fatally shot](#) while riding in an SUV being driven near the site.

The shooting of Mr. Brooks led to the resignation of the city police chief, Erika Shields, and the officer responsible for firing the fatal shots was fired and charged with murder. Ultimately, that officer was reinstated to the police force and the criminal charges were dropped. But the situation was blamed for plummeting morale within the Atlanta Police Department and for officers leaving the agency.

The training center, which was approved by city officials in 2021, was billed as an opportunity to better prepare the police force to tackle crime, as well as lift morale and draw officers to join the department. The site is an old prison farm, with hundreds of acres that have largely been reforested.

Critics said the project would disturb an expanse of green space and disrupt the community around it. “People don’t want gunfire and bomb detonations to be the soundtrack of their neighborhood,” Bentley Hudgins, a local organizer who lives nearby, said while attending a vigil for the protester on Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Arrests: crypto exchange illicit funds probe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/us/politics/russian-citizen-bitzlato-cryptocurrency.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A Russian citizen who ran a cryptocurrency exchange that federal prosecutors say transmitted at least \$700 million in illicit funds has been arrested in Miami and charged with evading U.S. money-laundering safeguards, according to an indictment unsealed on Wednesday.</p> <p>The Russian citizen, Anatoly Legkodymov, 40, oversaw the exchange based in Hong Kong, Bitzlato, which knowingly enabled criminals “to profit from their wrongdoing, including ransomware and drug trafficking,” Kenneth A. Polite Jr., the assistant attorney general of the Justice Department’s criminal division, said during a news conference on Wednesday.</p> <p>The move was part of an intensifying effort by federal law enforcement agencies, in conjunction with European partners, to combat international cryptocurrency schemes and illegal transactions. In particular, they have sought to crack down on the activities of companies and people based in China and Russia operating in the unregulated corners of cyberspace known as the “darknet.”</p> <p>Five other men, of Russian and Ukrainian nationalities, were arrested in Spain, Portugal and Cyprus in connection with the investigation, officials in Paris told Agence France-Presse.</p> <p>If convicted, Mr. Legkodymov, who lives in Shenzhen, China, could face up to five years in prison. A senior law enforcement official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said he was likely to face other charges, possibly connected to money laundering. It was not immediately clear who was representing Mr. Legkodymov, the company’s majority shareholder.</p>

Encrypted internal company communications showed Mr. Legkodymov and other executives acknowledging that the exchange was trafficking in “dirty money,” including deposits made by drug dealers, said Breon Peace, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York.

In their chats, colleagues warned Mr. Legkodymov that the exchange’s customer base consisted of “addicts who buy drugs” and “drug traffickers,” a practice that could negatively affect the company’s long-term viability. In a message from May 29, 2019, according to court documents, Mr. Legkodymov told a fellow executive that many of Bitzlato’s users were “known to be crooks,” and admitted that many used false identity documents to register their accounts.

Investigators have also been able to track about \$15 million obtained from ransomware attacks that were laundered through Bitzlato.

Mr. Legkodymov has been under surveillance since arriving at Kennedy International Airport in Queens last October, and continued to play a central role in overseeing the exchange until he was arrested in Florida on Tuesday, officials said. He was scheduled to appear in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida later Wednesday.

Lisa O. Monaco, the deputy attorney general, said Bitzlato’s operations were connected to the operations of the \$5.2 billion Hydra Market, which accounted for an estimated 80 percent of all cryptocurrency transactions on the darknet before the department shut it down in April.

Prosecutors have described Hydra as “[an online criminal marketplace](#)” that enabled users in mainly Russian-speaking countries to anonymously buy and sell drugs, stolen financial information and fraudulent identification, and money-laundering services.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Auburn car dealership repeated break-ins
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/auburn-car-dealership-plagued-by-repeat-break-ins-owner-takes-matters-into-own-hands
GIST	<p>AUBURN, Wash. - A car dealership owner is asking for help catching the men who allegedly keep breaking into his business.</p> <p>Behnam Ghafari, the 33-year-old owner of Auto Spot, says its been happening for months, he’s fed up and says he feels like he’s been stripped of his safety.</p> <p>Ghafari recalls the night like it was just yesterday—it started with a man walking in looking to buy a car with what he says was a fake ID.</p> <p>That’s when the problems began.</p> <p>Ghafari says around 2 a.m. Nov. 6, three men smashed the glass to the front door, walked in and took off with 45 keys to cars on the lot. Video surveillance shows them breaking the lock to the fencing finishing the job knocking it down with a blue car.</p> <p>"I was angry," Ghafari said. "We worked really hard for somebody to come and take everything we have, and nobody can do anything."</p> <p>The owner says two Auburn police cruisers were at the intersection near A St. SE when they noticed what was happening.</p> <p>Video shows one of the officers pulling up and trying to intervene, but that’s as far as it goes.</p> <p>The officer stops in the middle of the street after the thieves speed off, they get off and check the damages.</p>

Police did not chase them.

"When we talked to the police department, they said they can't chase," Ghafari said.

He says the thieves came back the next day around 4:40 a.m. ramming through the gate again, making off with an Audi. Ghafari says the thieves didn't make it more than four miles down the road since he deflated one of the tires.

"You don't have safety; honestly for a few weeks, I was scared going out," Ghafari said.

He says every day he questioned everyone who walked in and around the dealership wondering if they're real customers or thieves trying to get lucky again.

He says things were quiet until a week later, when he heard one of the cars on the lot being unlocked, and two hooded, masked men jumping inside it.

His first instinct was to slash the back tire to prevent them from driving off.

"After I did, I came to see who's this guy [is], when he pulled a gun on me," Ghafari said. "I was scared, it's a gun, so I jumped behind the car and they ran away."

Fast-forward to Nov. 22 when surveillance cameras pick up a truck crashing into the fence over and over again trying to get in.

Ghafari says it only stops after a man walks by, a witness who called him. Once again, Ghafari says police were in the area.

"I asked, 'What are you guys going to do?' They said, 'We feel sorry for you,'" Ghafari said.

He's been in auto sales since 2013; he and his brother moved their business to A St. SE in 2016.

Ghafari says crime has only spiked since 2020, starting with petty thefts like gas, tires and rims, only to worsen and have catalytic converters stripped off cars.

He says he's reported between 15–16 break-ins since 2020, but this is the costliest. He's repaired the fence at least four times, and he's not even done repairing the aftermath of the thefts.

"I'm afraid, like, someday we have to do something crazy to just keep them away from our businesses," Ghafari said.

FOX 13 News asked what that meant, and if he was armed.

"After they pulled the gun on me, yes, that was the only choice," Ghafari said.

Even though Ghafari and his brother have taken proactive measures to protect their business and prevent people from walking in unnoticed, he says it's a family effort now, protecting the dealership and watching cameras in the middle of the night.

A total of 45,033 vehicles were stolen in 2022 according to the Puget Sound Auto Task Force and 1,536 in King County in November alone.

Ghafari is now pushing for a change in legislation to help protect small businesses like his.

"I want them to think twice about the bill they put in, like if the police doesn't have any power what is the point having police department?" Ghafari said. "They have to bring the safety back to Washington."

	FOX 13 News has reached out to Auburn Police and are waiting to hear back.
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HEADLINE	01/18 Concern: barista safety after Auburn attack
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/im-just-scared-concerns-barista-safety-after-recent-attack-auburn-coffee-stand/C2FZNCPK2VCYPPWQWZTMIPJ5EM/
GIST	<p>Auburn — Although police have arrested the man they believe tried to kidnap a bikini barista in Auburn Monday morning, baristas are still worried for their safety.</p> <p>One barista, who owns her coffee stand, says she’s in the process of changing it to be more family friendly in the hopes of keeping criminals away, according to KIRO 7’s Bridget Chavez.</p> <p>She says she’s scared to come into work, given the recent attack, a lack of security, and often having to be open early in the morning.</p> <p>“Seeing that today, I didn’t come to work,” the barista said. “I was supposed to be here at 4 a.m. I keep changing my hours on social media, people think I’m being lazy but I’m not, I’m just scared.”</p> <p>She says she’s already on edge and has pepper spray in the shape of a gun by her side at all times.</p> <p>“I just have it here in case if my life is in danger like that girl,” she said.</p> <p>She asked to remain anonymous due to safety concerns.</p> <p>“People ask me what time are you going to be open and I’m like ‘I don’t know,’ I feel like I’m going to get targeted,” the barista said. “There are people that work for Boeing or other places that have to be there at 5 a.m. or 6 a.m. and they want to get coffee but I’m too scared to be here.”</p> <p>Matthew Willam Darnell was arrested by Auburn police on Tuesday and faced a judge Wednesday. He was held on \$500,000 bail.</p> <p>Prosecutors argued Darnell should be charged with attempted kidnapping with sexual motivation.</p> <p>According to court documents, Darnell was arrested at his home in Auburn where he allowed officers to search his truck. Officers say they found a black colored looped zip-tie under the front passenger seat.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this crime has happened in the Puget Sound region before. In 2018, a man jumped into a coffee stand in Kent, held the barista at gunpoint, and forced her to leave the stand with him. She escaped and was able to call 911, and the man was later arrested.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 West Seattle: 3 USPS trucks w/mail stolen
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/3-usps-mail-trucks-stolen-west-seattle-with-mail-inside/Q5BHRLJWGRBYTLP6HQQY3GASUJ4/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The U.S. Postal Inspector, Seattle Division, says at least three USPS mail trucks have been stolen in West Seattle just in January.</p> <p>Two incidents happened on Tuesday in West Seattle’s Alki neighborhood.</p> <p>Thieves ransacked the trucks and took off with mail and packages before abandoning the vehicles just blocks away from where the vehicles were taken.</p> <p>“Unbelievable. Unbelievable! Are they staking it out?” said Dean Bachmayer.</p> <p>The thefts happened between 2:30 p.m. and 3 p.m.</p>

John Wiegand, U.S. Postal Inspector, says the letter carriers followed proper protocol and left the vehicles locked and secured.

“They returned to the spot they were parking at, and the trucks were gone. They were able to immediately notify us,” Weigand said. None of the letter carriers were harmed.

One USPS truck was stolen in the 3600 block of 57th Place SW. Another was taken from the 3300 block of Beach Drive SW, right along the waterfront.

Investigators are asking people to be on the lookout for a truck seen near both scenes. “It looks like a late 90s purple Ford Ranger, potentially with a black canopy on the back,” Wiegand said.

He says it’s unclear how the suspects got inside the mail trucks.

“In neither of these instances were the vehicles left running. These are sophisticated thieves. They know how to get into all types of vehicles, whether it’s hotwiring, whether it’s through shaved keys. They’ve got all sorts of tools, so we’re still running the exact line,” Weigand said.

Sherin Babaei is now wondering if her mail was impacted.

“An entire mail truck is kind of crazy, especially if it happened in the middle of the day,” Babaei said. “Now that I’m thinking about it, maybe I checked, and there wasn’t anything there – so potentially, I didn’t get my mail yesterday,” she said.

Wiegand says USPS truck thefts are already a rare crime nationwide. So for three to happen in January in West Seattle, two of them within 30 minutes, makes this situation very unusual.

“It’s not common at all,” Wiegand said.

If you were expecting mail with sensitive information, like a credit/debit card or checkbook, and didn’t receive it, you can contact the United States Postal Inspection Service at www.uspis.gov/.

You can also call the 24-hour hotline at 1877-876-2455.

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HEADLINE	01/18 Tacoma: arrests; armed robberies at ATMs
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/2-suspects-arrested-tacoma-atm-robberies/281-84e93fb8-9bc0-43d6-bd5f-a2ed97b25afc
GIST	<p>Two suspects in a series of armed robberies at Tacoma ATMs were arrested by police, the department announced Wednesday.</p> <p>A third suspect believed to be involved in the robberies is still outstanding, the Tacoma Police Department said in a release.</p> <p>From late December through early January, community members reported a total of 10 armed robberies at ATM locations near 72nd Street and Pacific Avenue and 56th Street and South Tacoma Way.</p> <p>During the investigation, detectives identified the three suspects, along with a vehicle that was used in all 10 of the robberies.</p> <p>Police developed probable cause to arrest all three. One 20-year-old suspect was arrested at a home in Tacoma and booked for 10 counts of first-degree robbery. He is being held on \$750,000 bail at the Pierce County Jail.</p>

	<p>On Tuesday, police arrested an 18-year-old suspect at an apartment in Tacoma. He was also booked into the Pierce County Jail on five counts of first degree robbery and is being held on \$300,000 bail.</p> <p>During both arrests, investigators recovered firearms, including with with an illegal fully-automatic modification.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Gunman in car fatally shoots 11yr-old girl
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/11-year-girl-shot-dead-after-buying-milk/story?id=96504015
GIST	<p>An 11-year-old girl was walking home after getting milk for her family when she was shot and killed in Syracuse, New York, officials said.</p> <p>Brexialee Torres-Ortiz was struck by a gunman in a car who was firing at a different person, Syracuse Police Chief Joe Cecile said at a news conference Tuesday, calling it a "true tragedy."</p> <p>Brexialee was at a corner store that was about 100 yards from her apartment, he said.</p> <p>Officers responded to the shooting at about 7:45 p.m. Monday and found Brexialee shot in the mid-section, Cecile said. She was taken to a hospital where she died, he said.</p> <p>"We lost a special young lady," Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh said. "My heart breaks for her family, her friends, her classmates. It is an unimaginable pain."</p> <p>A 19-year-old man was also shot at the scene, Cecile said. He was struck in the leg and is expected to survive, according to the chief.</p> <p>It's not clear if the 19-year-old was the target, Cecile said. There's no apparent connection between the 19-year-old and Brexialee, he added.</p> <p>No arrests have been made and Cecile pleaded with the community to come forward with tips.</p> <p>"I would hope that the public, that the community, would be more forthcoming on an incident involving a little 11-year-old girl who had nothing to do with crime," he said.</p> <p>Brexialee loved to dance, Cecile said. She was president of her fifth-grade class and part of her school's high honors program, the chief said.</p> <p>Cecile said he talked to Brexialee's principal who spoke of "how much she cared about others and showed it every day."</p> <p>Jessica Barnett's 11-year-old daughter, Jayonis, was friends with Brexialee at school.</p> <p>Barnett called her "a bright, young, little girl."</p> <p>As for Jayonis, Barnett said she thinks her daughter is still in shock. She said she plans to talk to her daughter about Brexialee every day and "get her some things to remind her of her."</p> <p>"This is my first time dealing with something like this for my child," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/18 Gunfire damages NC electrical substation
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/electrical-substation-damaged-gunfire-north-carolina/story?id=96517306
GIST	Another electrical substation damaged by gunfire in North Carolina

An electrical substation in North Carolina has been damaged by gunfire, marking the third incident where a substation was damaged since November.

An EnergyUnited substation was damaged around 3 a.m. Tuesday, but there were no outages in the areas it serves: Trinity, Thomasville, and parts of Davidson County, south of Thomasville.

The FBI, North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations, the Randolph County Sheriff's Office and local law enforcement are investigating the incident.

There are currently no known suspects or motives.

"EnergyUnited continually strives to deliver safe, reliable energy to its members," Steve McCachern, vice president of energy delivery for the company, said in a statement. "While we are glad that our members did not experience any service interruptions, we take this matter very seriously and are currently investigating the incident."

Company officials responded to an alarm at its Pleasant Hill substation indicating an issue with its equipment, EnergyUnited said.

This is the latest incident of an electrical substation being hit by gunfire in the state.

On Dec. 3, two Duke Energy stations in North Carolina's Moore County were targeted by gunfire, causing about 45,000 customer outages, amid freezing temperatures in the state.

Vandals wielding firearms are suspected of having damaged the substations in the Moore County incident.

Officials found evidence of sabotage at two critical electrical substations following the massive blackout, prompting the Moore County Sheriff's Office to investigate the incident as a "criminal occurrence" and call in the FBI to assist in the probe.

There was another incident on Nov. 11, when a Carteret-Craven Electric Cooperative station in Maysville, North Carolina, was vandalized, causing 12,000 customers to go without power.

It's not immediately clear whether these incidents are related.

Kevin Perry, retired director of critical infrastructure protection at Southwest Power Pool in Arkansas, told ABC News last month that most electrical distribution substations across the country may be vulnerable to vandalism or copper theft, but redundancies and backup systems built into power grids prevent widespread blackouts.

"Substations tend to be out in the middle of nowhere, and that means they're, for the most part, unattended," Perry said at the time.

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